









THE
INVISIBLE GENTLEMAN,

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“CHARTLEY THE FATALIST,” “THE ROBBER,”
&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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Page 5

THE INVISIBLE GENTLEMAN.

CHAPTER XV.

SMALL is the chance which any unfortunate youth has of preserving his secret, when three young ladies have united with a determination to find it out !

Such were the odds against Bernard Audrey, when, after the uncomfortable parting from his uncle, he made his way to Russell Square, and was received by the fair plotters much in the usual way. The newspapers, however, were upon the table, and reminded him of Sir William's intended explanation to Mr. Storer, and the consequent necessity, in which he was placed, of giving a similar account of his Bow-street

and St. Giles's adventure. Therefore, judging that it would be better to anticipate inquiry, he boldly, and with an assumed air of gaiety, told Alicia that he had something to relate which would, probably, cause a laugh at his expense.

“I should have told you last night,” he continued, “had it not been for that rough Captain, whose coarse jokes I really could not have endured;” and he then proceeded with the tale already well known to the reader.

It would be highly indecorous to say that the fair sex are fond of mischief; but, certainly, they do dearly enjoy the pleasure of catching the “lords of the creation” in any ridiculous dilemma. Consequently, Bernard’s account of his own folly and its consequences put the three friends into high spirits, and the “fib” of the preceding evening was lost sight of, in the moment of excitement.

After a little rallying, however, it was referred to by Miss Read, who said,

“So, then, after all, the marks on your hands

were produced by handcuffs, as Captain Hardinge guessed, and *not* by lifting weights?"

Our hero, thus compelled to acknowledge the fabrication, professed himself perfectly ashamed of it, and again hinted at his dread of the seaman's roughness.

"You must have observed my confusion," he continued, "at his very abrupt remark during dinner. I hardly know what I said—but I did hope that, as I made use of another name, the particulars of the foolish affair might have been concealed. Now, however, as the newspapers have got hold of it, and mixed up my uncle's name with it in a very improper manner, concealment is quite out of the question."

"Then," observed Alicia, somewhat gravely, "it is *merely* because the whole must be known to the *public*, that you are induced to extend your confidence to *us*. We are certainly much indebted to you for such a compliment."

"Indeed, Alicia," replied Bernard, "I could have no wish to hide the matter from you.

Why should I? I should have taken the earliest opportunity."

Alicia had now become still more serious, and, steadfastly looking him in the face, she said,—

" You do not mean to tell me that you have *no* secrets concealed from me? You cannot mean to say that you inform me of all you do, and all that happens to you?"

" My dear Alicia," stammered Bernard, " what would you have me say? Surely I conceal nothing from you that can interest—that can give you pleasure?"

" Nothing?" exclaimed Alicia, " nothing? Are you sure there is nothing? Look at him, Charlotte! Look, Emily! See how he changes colour! and, just now, how he hesitated! Yes, Sir, there is something. A change, a very great change has taken place in you, lately. It is no fancy of mine, for we have all observed it—and there must be a cause for it, and what that cause is I am determined to know, or else——"

Here the poor young lady was so over-powered by her feelings, that she was obliged to stop and give way to a flood of tears. Her lover experienced little less of agitation. At one moment he was endeavouring to assist her, and the next he hastily paced up and down the room. It appeared evident to him that matters were approaching to a crisis ; but the avowal of his invisibility was not to be rashly hazarded, as he felt that it must lead to the discovery of the multitudinous lies and misrepresentations, into the committal of which his unlucky gift had gradually drawn him.

When Alicia had somewhat recovered, he sate himself down by her side, and, taking her half-yielded hand, begged her to tell him what she suspected, what she wished him to say, upon what part of his conduct she required information ; and assured her that he should be most happy to reply to any questions which she might be pleased to ask, as he felt perfectly conscious of not having been guilty of any act that could merit her displeasure.

“I have already spoken as plainly as possible. There is a mystery about you,” said Alicia, at the same time withdrawing her hand and shuddering; “strange things have happened, when you have either been present or very near. I have dreadful presentiments of I know not what. In this very room, the other night—I tremble when I think of it!”

“You cannot suppose that I felt less than yourself, when I saw you taken so suddenly ill?” asked her lover. “Surely, Alicia, I neither said nor did any thing, on that occasion, to offend you?”

“I am not capable of talking to you any longer,” said Alicia, rising: “Lend me your arm Emily. Charlotte, I leave all farther explanation with you. You know my mind, and will inform Mr. Audrey. No, Bernard, no, sir, do not attempt to detain me now. It is cruel. You see I am unwell.”

Our hero followed her to the door, and, when she had retired, he returned to Miss

Read, whose dark penetrating eyes were fixed upon him with a keenness of intelligence which seemed triumphantly to threaten that she was determined to read the very inmost secrets of his heart.

“What can all this mean?” exclaimed Bernard. “You talk of my being changed. Surely, my dear Miss Read, the change is rather in you, and Alicia, and Emily? Why do you look at me in that fearfully suspicious way? You were not wont to do so. Tell me but what I am suspected of, and so give me an opportunity of clearing myself. I repeat to you, solemnly, that I have done nothing which ought to incur the loss of your friendship or Alicia’s affection?”

“But her confidence?” said Charlotte, “where is that? and, where confidence is at an end, methinks affection can no longer exist as it ought. I will deal plainly with you, sir. I do not profess to have had experience in such matters, and they say that our affections are

not in our own power; but our actions are; and, if Alicia follow my advice and her own excellent judgment, she will never unite herself to one who has a cloud of mystery hanging over him. In your case there will be no breach of faith, for I tell you, distinctly, that you are no longer the same person as when we were together at Maxdean. No—that downcast and troubled look, which you wear at this moment, belongs not to the character of that Bernard Audrey to whom I was then introduced, and with whom I immediately felt myself perfectly at ease. It would be useless to pursue the comparison, because you must be perfectly sensible of the difference—and you, likewise, alone know the cause of the change. It is this cause which Alicia seeks, and has a right to know. If you persist in concealing it, she will, probably, guess something worse than the reality: but, however that may be, I am authorized to tell you, positively, that she never will be your's."

While speaking, and after she remained

silent, the young lady still kept her searching eyes fixed upon our hero, attentively watching the effect of her words. His changing colour, the wincing expression of his countenance, and the shifting uneasiness of his attitude, told her that the impression she had made was not trifling.

For some time he sate silent and motionless, with his eyes fixed upon the ground ; then hiding his face in his hands, he long continued lost in thought, and vainly endeavouring to devise some middle course, for the purpose of extricating himself from the dilemma in which Alicia's resolution had placed him. At length, he was struck by what he conceived to be an exceedingly lucky thought ; and, having hastily arranged his plan, he told Miss Read, that certainly he had, latterly, had many things on his mind, and that, on reflection, he could not be surprised that she and Alicia had observed an alteration in his manners, from what they were when he really had nothing to think of.—

“But,” he continued, “my silence on those subjects did not proceed from any want of confidence. It was merely to save her from uneasiness that I kept back the knowledge of them from her, till they should be finally arranged. After what you have told me, however, I have no choice; and, if Alicia will give me an opportunity of speaking to her, in an hour or two, or in the course of the evening, she shall have no reason to complain of my withholding any thing from her.”

“Nay!” exclaimed Miss Read, rising, “let it be immediately. I will go and persuade her to come down-stairs.”

“I fear she is too much agitated at present,” said Bernard.

“There again!” ejaculated the lynx-eyed young lady, “you fear according to your words, but your looks say that you hope she cannot come immediately.”

Practised as our hero now was in deceit, this observation somewhat startled him, as Charlotte was crossing to leave the room at the moment,

and caught the expression of his countenance in a pier-glass. She was in the act of opening the door for the purpose of going to summon Alicia, ere he recovered himself sufficiently to request that the conference might be delayed for a few hours, assigning, as a reason, that he had hopes of satisfactorily arranging an unpleasant affair which he had then in hand, in the interim.

“It would therefore,” he added, “be giving Alicia useless pain to speak of it now, as of course I must, since nothing is to be concealed.”

Miss Read felt that she could not well object to such a plausible reason for delay: but she shook her head incredulously, and observed,

“The sooner we can get to the end of this affair, the better it will be for all parties. I tremble for Alicia’s peace of mind; and if you set a just value upon it, you will not interpose any unnecessary delays. At what time may we expect your return?”

“It will entirely depend upon the persons

whom I am going to see," was the reply; " but I hope to be here an hour or two before dinner: or, if not, we can have all the evening to ourselves. In the mean while, pray desire Alicia not to give way to idle apprehensions; for indeed there is not the smallest foundation for any alarm on her part." With these words he took leave.

" And now," thought he, as he was descending the stairs, " it must be stratagem against stratagem. I am watched, it seems —so I must watch, in my turn. Charlotte is a fine, bold, warm-hearted girl, and a clever girl too, that I must say for her; but, piercing as her eyes are, it will be odd indeed if they can discern more than a pair which can observe all that passes without the possibility of detection, and ears that can hear without being seen."

When he had left the square, he began to look out for a convenient place, where, according to his plan, he might safely make his

disappearance. An unfinished house soon afforded him a snug retreat ; and, as he entered, he reflected that he was not about to avail himself, this time, of his extraordinary gift for any frivolous purpose, but as a step absolutely necessary towards the prosecution of an affair, in which his marriage, and, consequently, the happiness of his future life, appeared to be involved.

Having performed the usual ceremony, he came forth, in invisible guise, and proceeded to walk, unseen, to and fro, before Mr. Storer's house, watching a favourable opportunity to enter. The execution of this part of his plan was not, however, quite so easy as it would have been at Maxdean Hall. The only person who was admitted, had glided through the half-opened door, which was immediately closed. In a few minutes he slipped out again in the same manner. A footman held the door as he passed ; popped out his own head, as if to take a mouthful of fresh air, and then

popped in again, like the toy called Jack-in-the-box, and all was closed as before.

“ Time is too precious to be wasted thus ! ” exclaimed Bernard ; “ so I ’ll give a ‘ rat-tat ’ at the door, and slip in, while the fellow is looking after ‘ the runaway.’ ”

But, unfortunately, this scheme did not succeed, as his knock, not having been preceded by the sound of carriage-wheels, was replied to from the area by a voice demanding, “ Who ’s there ? ” and, as the inquirer received no reply, and, upon ascending several steps, could not perceive any one, he retired, muttering :—“ I wish I could catch you, my lad ! I ’d give you a proper hiding.”

While our hero was meditating upon his next step for gaining admittance into the citadel, a baker made his appearance, and, opening the iron gate of the area, lifted his basket on the rails, and prepared to descend with the accustomed load.

“ I will follow him,” thought Bernard :

“ what a ridiculous thing not to have gone in that way at first !”

Little dreaming that any one was close behind him, the baker took his huge basket from off the rails, where he had balanced it while entering, and having descended a few steps, jerked it adroitly across his shoulder, and struck the unlucky, uninitiated, invisible gentleman violently on the head and shoulders, thereby producing, though unseen, a sad discoloration of his garments. But the most perplexing part of the thing was the loss of his hat, which, being knocked off his head, became, of course, visible, and rolled down into the area.

“ How now !” cried the astonished baker ; “ somebody tumbled out of the window ? No, it’s only a hat : but it must have fallen from a pretty good height, at any rate ; for it well nigh knocked my basket off my shoulders.” And then, being more of an operative than a philosopher, he descended the remaining steps, entered the kitchen, deposited the accustomed

supply of crust and crum upon the dresser, and told the cook that somebody up-stairs had let a hat tumble into the area. The alacrity of the cook, who immediately ran out to see what had happened, prevented our hero from recovering his beaver, a thing of little moment under existing circumstances.

The only remaining part of his task now was, to make his way out of the lower regions; and in that he apprehended no difficulty. But, as he was ascending the narrow stairs, he encountered a maid servant coming down with a tray, which completely blocked up the passage. A retrograde movement was the only way of avoiding the difficulty; and, just as he commenced it, the girl cried :—

“ You must stop where you are, John; you can’t come by till I’ve got down stairs.”

Bernard thus discovered that he was completely hemmed in between the descending maid and an ascending footman: but, as the latter would doubtless give way, he continued

his retreat, not, however, for more than two steps, in consequence of John's very ill-timed gallant exclamation :—

“ That tray 's too heavy for you, Molly ; I know you 'll meet with an accident some day, and hurt yourself : so give it me, that 's a good girl.” And forthwith, suiting the action to the word, he advanced, with extended arms, to relieve the fair nymph from her burden. There was but an instant for decision. Bernard crouched down below the tray, to secure his invisible person from coming into contact with the vigorous arms of John ; and then, advancing upon “ all-fours,” he crept hastily past Molly, and so extricated himself very cleverly, as he thought, from his momentary embarrassment. But, as has been hinted before, he was not precisely a dwarf in stature ; and the kitchen stairs were built after the laudable rules of metropolitan architecture, whereby the least quantum of room is given where the most is required, to the manifest

advantage of servants in general, who are thus compelled to practise “right or left shoulders forward” in their crab-like evolutions, when conveying ponderous aliments to the “*nati fruges consumere.*”* For these reasons, Bernard could not avoid brushing the legs of the descending Hebe somewhat roughly in his transit; and she, looking down, and perceiving nothing outside of her clothes, became suddenly struck with a horrible fancy, the effects of which were, a clear, shrill, feminine squall; the deposition of all the objects of her previous care into the bosom of the gallant John; and the suspension of herself about his neck, where she hung, kicking and struggling, under the impression that a snake, or some other “inwisible warment,” was yet entangled about her lower extremities.

Leaving them to settle the affair as they might, our hero made his way to the door of

* Those whose privilege it is to consume the fruits, or, more expressively, to live upon “the fat of the land.”

the drawing-room, and was hesitating whether to open it gently and enter, when the bell was rung violently, and determined him to await the coming of a servant. A second peal, however, was necessary ; and then a stout, country lass, known in the family by the name of Big Betty, came bouncing up the stairs two steps at a time, opened the drawing-room door, and stood in the way so awkwardly, as to render it impossible for him to pass. It was still some satisfaction to hear Alicia's voice, and those of her two friends, inquiring the reason of the uproar below, and why John or Molly did not answer the bell ?

“ There wor nobody else but me fit to come,” replied Betty ; “ for Molly says she see’d a snake, or a boar,* running up-stairs, though they arn’t a bit alike for the matter of that ; and so, how she could take one for t’other, I can’t tell. Howsomever, she was

* Most likely a Boa Constrictor.

fritted out of her senses, and screeched out, and let all the beer, and gravy, and the rest o' the lunch, tumble atop o' John, and spiled his best clothes. I'm sure I don't know what master 'll say!"

"A snake or a boar!" exclaimed Miss Read: "what can all this possibly mean?"

"Pray shut the door!" cried Emily; and immediately it was slammed in our hero's face by the sturdy nymph.

"I'll not be diverted from my intention by this folly," thought he, stooping and peeping through the keyhole: "she's gone to the farther end of the room, and her awkwardness will make them suppose she did not fasten the door properly; so now is the time!" And, quietly turning the lock, he gently pressed forward, and entered unperceived.

But poor Emily's eyes being turned in that direction, she instantly caught the alarm, and, doubting not that the monster which had frightened Molly, intended to pay them a visit,

made known her fears by a suitable exclamation.

“Don’t be afraid, Miss,” cried Big Betty, seizing the poker; “boar or snake, I don’t care which, let un come, and I’ll warrant I’ll give un as good as he brings.”

“Well, shut the door again, at all events,” said Alicia. “Don’t bang it so hard; I suppose that is the reason why it did not fasten before.”

Anonymous writers are frequently placed in whimsical and embarrassing situations when in company where their presence is not known; and we can assure the reader, that a good deal of management is occasionally necessary: and the case of a perfectly invisible individual, when others are moving round him, is somewhat similar, as he cannot possibly guess which way they will turn next, nor how soon he may find himself in unpleasant contact with the person whom, of all others, perhaps, he is most anxious to avoid.

Thus was it with our hero. Big Betty, when ordered to shut the door, bounced towards it with boisterous alacrity, and, ere he could get out of the way, trod, with her whole weight, upon his foot. Shrinking naturally from the pressure, he withdrew the unfortunate member; and, as he stood behind the numerous folds of a crimson curtain, the place was somewhat dark.

“ I trod upon ‘un then !” cried the amazon ; “ I felt ‘un go !” But, instead of being terrified out of her senses, like her fellow-servant, even as she spake the words, she struck, with all her might, in the direction from whence she had just removed her foot, and the formidable weapon fell upon our unlucky hero’s left invisible shin, inflicting a degree of pain which would have made him roar at any other time. As it was, he was obliged to content himself with dancing out of the way of the excited damsel as quickly as possible.

“ I thought I hit ‘un !” she exclaimed : “ but

no! a' ban't here; a' must 'a crawled under the carpet. Do, pray now, just get up, and walk about a bit. Some on us 'll be sure to tread upon 'un, if a's there; and 't 'll be a nice trap to catch 'un in. I 'll sarve 'un out then, I 'll warrant,—the warment!"

The three young ladies, however, felt no relish for such sport, and springing from their seats, they rushed out of the room, their twinkling feet touching the said carpet as lightly as those of Camilla.

Notwithstanding his bodily pain, Bernard felt this disappointment exceedingly; and, but for her sex, would, in the moment of irritation, have punished Big Betty in the same invisible style as that which he had exercised upon the two resurrectionists in St. Giles's. "What provoking folly!" he muttered, leaving the room; and then luckily, as he thought, he caught a glimpse of the retreating fair ones, at the bottom of the staircase. Determined not to let any chance slip, he followed, and saw

them descend to the kitchen, where the evidence of his ears soon convinced him that they went for the purpose of raising an alarm and sending succour to the valiant Betty.

Placing himself in a niche, out of every body's way, he resolved to await their return, and soon had the satisfaction of hearing their voices.

“ I dare not go up-stairs again,” said Emily.

“ There is no occasion for it,” observed Charlotte Read, calmly.

“ You need neither of you be under any alarm, for, if it really should be one of those constrictors got loose, they are not venomous. So let us go, while they are searching for it, and sit down quietly in the breakfast-parlour, and finish what we were talking about, for that is of more consequence than all the menageries in London.”

On this hint Bernard instantly acted, and, ere they entered, had already taken possession of the aforesaid parlour.

The debate was, as usual, led by Charlotte, who opened the sitting with observing, “ You were saying, Alicia, that if Mr. Audrey acted openly and candidly, you could forgive him anything but having sold himself to the enemy of mankind. Now that I look upon, in the present day, to be quite out of the question. I confess to you that I fear he will have something to tell you of his own conduct which he does not entirely approve of himself. This I judge from his confused and contradictory words and looks ; but when he declared that he had not done any thing on account of which he ought to be deprived of your affection, there was an honest confidence in his manner, by which I felt persuaded that he has not been guilty of aught very grievous and unpardonable.”

“ I could pardon him for any thing,” observed Alicia, “ if I did but *know* what it was. But this *mystery* — this extraordinary change, without explanation, I cannot, and will not

endure ; and, if he does not make the cause as plain to me as possible, my resolution is taken, and we part. I do not mean to play the heroine. It will cost me something, now matters have gone so far ; but, to act otherwise, would be to plunge into unhappiness for life with my eyes open."

Now it so happened that the floor of the parlour in which this important conference was held was covered by a Turkey carpet, on which our invisible hero moved to and fro, in the confidence of perfect silence.

He had already heard all that it was necessary for him to know, and was stringing his mind to the resolution of acquainting Alicia with all the particulars of his interview with the elderly pale-faced gentleman, together with its consequences, when he was most unpleasantly roused from his reverie.

She might, probably, have been yet thinking of the boa constrictor, but, from whatever cause it occurred, it so happened that Emily's eyes

were riveted upon the floor, and there, to her astonishment and dismay, she observed certain small portions of the thickly-matted carpet rise and fall, alternately, as the invisible walker placed and removed his feet. At first she thought the light or her eyes must be in fault; but when the movement continued, she pointed, pale and trembling, to the place, and drew the attention of her companions to the phenomenon.

Bernard saw them gazing at the spot where he stood, without comprehending why, till Miss Read said, "There certainly were motions in the carpet, and it appears to be pressed down now in two places, but they are perfectly stationary. Don't be frightened, my dears; let us go close and examine it, for you know there must be a cause for every thing."

Thus saying she arose, and, followed by Alicia and Emily, approached so near the spot where the invisible gentleman stood, as to render his retreat absolutely necessary; and then the mysterious movements were, of course, repeated

till he gained a more solid footing, in a corner which the carpet did not reach.

“ Oh, this is too horrible !” cried Alicia, retreating to the door.

“ Take me with you !” implored Emily, “ I can’t move a step.”

“ It is the most extraordinary thing,” exclaimed Charlotte. “ I do not believe in spirits—but—it was the print of a foot. Whatever thou art, I adjure thee, in the name of—”

“ Oh, don’t be so wicked ! don’t, dear Charlotte !” cried her companions, seizing, and literally dragging her out of the room.

When they were gone, Bernard let himself out of the front door, returned to the unfinished house, pulled his right ear, bought a new hat, and went home to anoint his poker-broken shin, and to dress for dinner.

CHAPTER XVI.

AFTER a bustling morning, principally spent in forwarding the interest of his friend Sir Marmaduke, our worthy merchant repaired to his home at the usual hour, and was not a little annoyed to find the whole house in confusion.

The first symptom of disorder was the appearance of John, the unlucky gallant footman, in an old suit of livery. This was so contrary to Mr. Storer's ideas of propriety and the strictness of his regulations, that it could not possibly have passed unnoticed; but John anticipated all inquiries by relating the particulars of poor Molly's downfall, and the escape of the serpent, which had not yet been discovered,

and, consequently, must still be somewhere about the house.

Mrs. Storer, who had been absent during the uproar, was now in the greatest alarm, expecting every moment the reappearance of the monster. And the valorous Big Betty came, howling and blubbering, out of the lower regions, to tell her master that she would not “a touched it, only she thought it was alive, and therefore must be the wermann as had sliddered itself into a jar, and was ogling her, and watching her motions;” and thereby her master at length understood that one of his incomparable, nodding, Chinese, china mandarins had been “smashed.”

All this was exceedingly trying to a regular, quiet, easy-going citizen, just as he came home, with a good appetite, to dinner. Then the three young ladies made their appearance, in most admired disorder, all looking pale, glancing timidly round and at each other, as if they judged the continuance of safety and tranquillity a very doubtful case.

Vexed as he was, Mr. Storer endeavoured to cheer the spirits of his wife and daughter by assuring them that he did not think there was any real cause for alarm. “Foolish girl! no business carrying great tray,” said he; “trod upon her own clothes—tangled herself—tumbled upon John—stupid fellow—ought to have got out of the way; romping, though, very like—shouldn’t wonder. Nobody *seen* any thing, it seems, eh? Great blundering hussy go knocking about with her poker among china images!—well it’s no worse—deserves to have her own head broke, though. Hark at* the door? Who’s there, I wonder—Oh, Bernard, I see,” and pleased at the idea of an assistant in the task of enlivening his “womankind,” he resolved to receive our hero as usual, and defer his lecture respecting the Bow-street mystification, &c. till they should be alone.

Bernard, when informed of the occurrences of the morning, was sedulously attentive to Alicia and her companions; but his attentions were received with a coldness and distrust for

which he knew too well how to account. It was some relief to all parties that an old friend of Mr. Storer's "looked in" on that day, to take his mutton with him "in a family way."

The meal, and a subsequent hour, passed off much as usual, and then our hero, having fortified himself with several bumpers, repaired to redeem his pledge of perfect confidence with Alicia.

As the drawing-room was judged untenable for the present, the ladies were in a parlour on the ground-floor; and, soon after his entrance, there was a whispering between Alicia and Charlotte, who then rose, and, on leaving the room, beckoned him to follow.

They led the way up-stairs to an elegant little "boudoir," where they were no sooner seated than Miss Read said she had much rather not be present at an interview in which Mr. Audrey might feel obliged to speak of family affairs; but Alicia insisted upon it that she should remain, as she was determined, in future, never to have any secrets with her.

Bernard had anticipated this state of things, and therefore, without hesitation, observed that he could not possibly have the smallest objection ; yet, if he might be allowed, he should rather recommend Alicia to give him a private hearing, after which she would be perfectly at liberty to communicate what she judged proper to her friend ; and he insinuated that part of what he had to say was of so very private a nature as to make *him* feel scarcely justified in mentioning it to a third party.

This hint was sufficient for the high-minded Charlotte, and in spite of her friend's entreaties, she decamped, leaving the oddly-situated brace of lovers together.

For the first minute an awkward silence reigned : Alicia looked at the fire, then at the rug, and then glanced at Bernard, who appeared to be occupied much in the same manner, as he was studying how to begin. Study, in such cases, seldom produces any very strikingly brilliant result. In the present, however, it was somewhat theatrical, for, feeling the im-

portance of the moment, and that he *might* lose Alicia, in consequence of his confession, she became suddenly more than usually dear to him, and, scarcely knowing what he did, he threw himself on his knees before her, and besought her to look upon him with a feeling of pity rather than of reproach, on account of the trifling deviations from truth into which he had been betrayed in so extraordinary a manner. The young lady looked as if to say, "This is all perfectly incomprehensible!"

" You see before you a man !" he exclaimed.

" Yes !" said Alicia.

" You see before you a man," he resumed ; " one who *was* happy—who had every thing man ought to wish for ! Blessed with the affection of her whom he loved—with yours, Alicia—the approbation of friends—health—wealth, flattering prospects—all—all *were* mine ! Yes, you are right in saying that I am *indeed* changed from what I was, when we were all so happy together at Maxdean. *Then* there

was no want of confidence: it seemed as though we read each other's hearts; each day brought its pleasures, and we slept soundly and sweetly, to renew them with fresh zest!"

Alicia heaved a sigh, shook her head, looked perplexed, and wondered much what all this was to lead to.

"Under such circumstances, Alicia," continued the victim of his own wishes, "I ought, most assuredly, to have been perfectly content; for I was really as happy as man could be—but, alas! in a moment of folly, I formed, and uttered a most ridiculous wish, which was almost immediately granted; and the possession of which has been the sole cause of the change you have observed in me. From that hour, scarcely a day has passed without my being involved in difficulties and suspicions, which, otherwise, never would—never could have occurred to me."

"What could your wish have been?" gasped Alicia, almost breathless with curiosity.

“ You shall hear,” said Bernard. “ You remember the day when we were all in such spirits, particularly Charlotte, and, like children, not knowing what to do with ourselves, we played at hide and seek in the garden?”

“ Perfectly,” replied the young lady.

“ On that morning,” resumed her repentant lover, “ I looked in at the parlour-window, and saw you three laughing and chatting together ; and a strange thought came across my mind — it could hardly then have been called a wish, for it was too vague, and wild, and improbable, and, as I thought, even impossible to be realized. But still it continued to haunt me as I walked alone in the shrubbery ; and at length, when sitting in your favourite bower, my mind became completely occupied with the pleasing fancy, and I wished —do not be alarmed—I wished for the power of rendering myself invisible !”

“ Oh !” shrieked Alicia, recoiling from him as though he had suddenly been transformed

into the dreaded boa-constrictor of the morning ; “ I see it all now ! Then you really have sold yourself to the evil one ? You have entered into a compact with the—— ? ”

“ No, indeed ; you wrong me much ! ” exclaimed Bernard : “ there was no compact—no agreement—no understanding of any kind ; for I had no suspicion of what was going on at the time. I looked upon the whole as a farce, till accident revealed to me that my mad wish was granted, and that I really possessed the power—— ”

“ Of making yourself invisible ? ” murmured Alicia, pale and trembling.

“ Even so,” replied her lover ; “ and, if you will hear me patiently, you will find that I am far more to be pitied than blamed, throughout the whole of the transaction and its consequences.”

Alicia had previously made a feint to decamp ; but the feeling of curiosity was sufficiently powerful to master certain rather un-

comfortable sensations, natural enough for a female unaccustomed to sit, *tête-à-tête*, with an individual confessedly possessed of supernatural powers.

She sate and listened, with mingled fear and wonder, to our hero's account of the sudden and inexplicable appearance of the pale-faced, elderly, strange gentleman, the mystic process of anointing her lover's ears, and the marvellous and mysterious consequences.

As he proceeded to refer to the accident which had befallen Miss Read in the garden, and confessed the share he had in the bell-pulling at Audrey Church, and other matters known to the reader, she continued to gaze upon him, sometimes with an expression of deep interest, then with a vacant stare, and anon, a thrill would come over her, and she would recede from him a little, as though he were not exactly the sort of person with whom she ought to be closeted.

But the influence of habit is proverbial.

The footing on which she had so long lived with Bernard, operated gradually to restore her to somewhat of self-possession; and at length she ventured to ask questions relative to divers transactions, not already clear. Bernard was all openness and candour. He had passed the Rubicon, and he felt his heart lighter, and was better pleased with himself than he had been at any period since the fatal morning, when he had given vent to his foolish wishes.

“ You will perhaps wonder and blame me, Alicia,” said he, “ for not immediately telling you of this extraordinary transaction; and I have often wished that I had done so; but I always dreaded the effect it possibly might have produced upon your mind. It was from the fear of shocking your feelings, and not from any want of confidence, that I concealed it. It would have been much better, perhaps, even now, had you not known it; as I had come to a resolution never again to avail myself of

the extraordinary power, unless upon some pressing emergency."

"And you really can make yourself invisible just when you please?" asked Alicia.

"I can," replied her lover.

"Convince me!" cried the young lady, holding fast by the arms of her chair, and screwing her courage to the sticking-place, like some firm believer in necromancy, determined to abide the rush of demons summoned by a sorcerer's incantation.

Our hero raised his hand, and instantly disappeared.

"Where are you?" she exclaimed.

"Here in the chair, close opposite to you," he replied; and ere the words were out of his mouth, his form flashed into sight. "And now I am gone again!" he continued, repeating the operation; "but still I can see you just as well as ever—and now I come back, and you see me as plainly as before. I have nothing more to do, than merely to follow the strange old fellow's directions. When I pull

this ear, so—I'm gone,—when I pull the other, so—I'm in sight again.” And thus, suiting the action to the word, he vanished and reappeared, successively, half-a-dozen times, and affected to treat the subject with jocularity.

“ You see,” said he, “ what a very simple thing it is; and I confess to you, that when I first found myself in possession of the power, I anticipated nothing more than a little harmless merriment, as, indeed, you may judge, by the way in which I made use of it. How could I have supposed that the bumpkins would have made up such a tale, and frightened an old woman to death?”

“ Don’t do it any more!” cried Alicia; “ don’t, pray! Give me the smelling-bottle! Pull the bell! I’m quite faint!—Oh!”

The paleness on her countenance told but too plainly that the moment of high excitement was past. Bernard attempted to support her.

“ No, no!” she murmured convulsively;

“ don’t touch me !—pull the bell !—go, and send Charlotte !”

He hastily pulled the bell-rope, and Miss Read, who had been anxiously waiting in an adjoining room, almost immediately made her appearance.

“ Leave me with Charlotte,” said Alicia ; “ I am unable to talk more with you now, Bernard. I am sorry for you ; but—but—you must leave me for the present. I am really too unwell. Do not expect me down-stairs again this evening. To-morrow I shall be better, by daylight ; and then—but pray leave me now ! — Do make him go, Charlotte !”

Miss Read here insisted ; and our hero was obliged, reluctantly, to quit the apartment.

“ Are you sure he is gone ?” murmured Alicia.

“ Yes, my dear girl,” was the reply ; “ you see there is no one here but ourselves. Compose yourself, my love. I perceive that he

has made some painful communication to you ; but do not consider yourself bound to tell me what it is. Think the matter over coolly, when you are recovered from your present agitation ; and then use your own judgment. Situated as you and Mr. Audrey are now, and are likely to be hereafter, you cannot well be too scrupulous, relative to any secret with which he may have entrusted you."

While her friend was speaking, poor Alicia had done little else than sniff up the contents of her smelling-bottle.

" Come and sit down by me, Charlotte, my dear Charlotte !" she exclaimed ; " sit close to me ! There—that 's right. Oh ! perhaps he is here now ! What shall I do ? What will become of me ?" and throwing her arms round the neck of her friend, she hid her face in her bosom, and sobbed convulsively.

Miss Read was more affected than alarmed at what she witnessed, for the manner in which Alicia had addressed Bernard at parting, ap-

peared not to indicate that any very serious misunderstanding had occurred between them.

At length the poor girl, still keeping her arms round the neck of her friend, lifted up her head, and looking wildly round, murmured again, “Are you sure he is gone?”

“Yes, indeed, my dear,” replied Charlotte; “you see we are alone.”

“I see! I see!” said Alicia; “but from henceforth, I am not to believe what I see: and you will scarcely believe me when I tell you what I have seen—or, rather, what I have not seen, and yet was made so dreadfully plain to me!”

“You speak mystically, my love,” observed Miss Read, smiling; “but never mind about it now. You are agitated at present. We will talk the matter over coolly another time.”

“No, Charlotte,” said Alicia, with reviving firmness, “I cannot hesitate a moment in telling you all; for you must be my guide and counsellor. Do not think me delirious in con-

sequence of what I am about to relate. I hope I shall preserve my senses, though, just now, I confess to have been the victim of strange, bewildering sensations."

She then proceeded to describe, as clearly as she was able, the substance of what she had heard, and the strange metamorphoses which she had witnessed.

A brief silence ensued, and then she asked Miss Read how she would advise her to act under such extraordinary circumstances?

"I must take time to think," said her friend; "I cannot attempt to counsel you without reflecting. Had you known of this power, or gift, or whatever it may be called, of Mr. Audrey's, in the first instance, I should have recommended you strongly not to have admitted his addresses; but now things have gone so far between you, I know not what to say. The most objectionable part of his conduct, as it appears to me at present, is the mean use which he seems to have made

of his power, in listening to our conversation; for there can be no doubt now, that those were his footsteps which we saw this morning upon the turkey-carpet in the breakfast-parlour."

"Perhaps he is even here now, looking at, and listening to us!" exclaimed Alicia, shuddering.

"We will soon ascertain that," said Charlotte, ringing the bell; "and if you mean to extend your confidence to Emily, it would be kind to do so as soon as possible; for she is still suffering dreadfully from the fright of the morning."

In consequence of this proposition, a servant was despatched to summon Miss Hitchins to their conference, and to ascertain if Mr. Audrey had yet left the house. The former soon made her appearance, and reported that the latter was closely engaged in conversation with Mr. Storer, who appeared more than usually earnest in the subject, whatever it might be:

but of that she could not guess, as he spoke in a low tone, and was at the farther end of the dining-room, to which Mrs. Storer and herself had returned to make tea, in consequence of the confusion of the household.

The fact was, that the worthy merchant's old friend had left him early, and he had availed himself of the opportunity to give Bernard a lecture upon his aberration from truth in the affair of the handcuffs, and his folly in the wholesale adoption of other people's children, instead of availing himself of the resources provided by public benevolence.

After what had just passed above stairs, it cannot be supposed that our hero was either in a fit state to profit by the good advice bestowed upon him, or to defend himself against what might be laid to his charge. In reality, the major part of the words addressed to him, fell upon an unconscious ear; for his mind was absent, conjecturing what might be then passing between the friends in Alicia's

boudoir. Mr. Storer, however, as he afterwards told his wife, thought the young gentleman “dumb-founded and sulky;” but scrupled not, on that account, to tell him his mind in a very plain manner.

But we return to the ladies. Poor little Emily opened her eyes and mouth as wide as might be at the wondrous tale, and stared wildly round, as if to find traces of an invisible personage; and, when her first burst of amazement had subsided a little, was called upon by Alicia for her advice. Instead of hesitating, like Charlotte, she instantly said:—

“Have nothing more to do with him! How dreadful to think of having a husband who might be close by, watching and listening to all you did or said, when you supposed him to be a hundred miles off! You never could be happy with him, I’m sure. And then—who can tell? Most likely *some* of your children—*all*, perhaps—but *certainly*, the boys, would have the same property as their father.

I think I see you now looking about in vain to find them. Oh ! how horrible to think of having invisible children !”

“ Horrible, indeed !” exclaimed Charlotte, laughing ; “ but I really cannot think, my dear, that there is any great danger on that head. I certainly have never been given to understand that extraordinary gifts are hereditary.”

“ I don’t know,” observed Emily, seriously ; “ the whole affair is out of the common course of things, and, after this, I shall never wonder at any thing. I know that I would not marry an invisible husband, if he was worth his weight in diamonds ; and if I did, I should expect, at least, that the children would take after their father ; and that would be punishment enough.”

“ It would, indeed !” exclaimed Charlotte, who appeared tickled with the fancy. “ Poor Emily ! I think I see you groping into every hole and corner, (for it would be of no use

to look, you know,) for your invisible bantlings. At all events, it would make you careful how you pulled their ears."

"I really never saw any thing like you, Charlotte," said Emily; "you turn every thing into ridicule. And yet, only this morning, you would have supposed Mr. Audrey's being what he is, quite as improbable as what I have now imagined."

Alicia had, for a moment, allowed herself to smile at Charlotte's remark; but Emily's suggestion made a strong impression on her mind.

The result of their subsequent conference will appear from the line of conduct adopted towards our hero.

CHAPTER XVII.

IT is not to be supposed that our unfortunately-gifted hero slept particularly sound the night after he had revealed his secret to Alicia, and had received, in return, an order to come and hear his sentence on the following morning. He was visited by dreams in very considerable abundance, and none of the most agreeable kind. The elderly, pale-faced gentleman appeared, in these nocturnal visions, wonderfully gay, dancing about after a clumsy and grotesque fashion, flourishing his brace of boxes in the air, and ever and anon “grinning horribly a ghastly” and triumphant smile, which he varied occasionally by a loud, hollow, and equally triumphant laugh.

The eventful morning commenced with a long lecture from Sir William, on the old subject of the five orphan children ; and when that was ended, Bernard repaired, with a palpitating heart, to Russell-square.

After he had waited a considerable time alone in the drawing-room, Miss Read made her appearance, and stated, that Alicia was sorry that she should not be able to see him, as she was really extremely unwell.

“ She has been much agitated,” continued Charlotte, “ in consequence of the singular communication which you made to her last night, and which, indeed, if she understood it rightly, was enough to appal any one.”

“ There cannot be any mistake,” replied Bernard : “ I suppose you are in the secret ?”

“ She did tell me, certainly,” said Charlotte ; “ but I find it hard to believe, and think the light must have deceived her.”

“ Not at all,” sighed our hero : “ but pray tell me that she estimates my situation rightly,

and is convinced that I am the innocent victim of a designer, who stole suddenly upon me, and, ere I was aware, took advantage of my expressing a foolish wish. She sees the affair in that light, I trust?"

The young lady would not, or could not speak positively, but continued to express her doubts relative to the fact itself, till our hero was induced to give her likewise a specimen of his powers.

In spite of her habitual courage, she became extremely pale, as he came and went from before her eyes, like an unsubstantial shadow.

"Perplexing as this power is," said Bernard, affecting gaiety; "provoking, indeed, as I may call it; you must be aware, my dear Miss Read, that there is no crime in possessing it."

"Perhaps not," replied Charlotte; "but it is a perplexing affair, as you say; and, were I in Alicia's place, I really should be much at a loss how to decide. I wish you had been candid enough to have informed her of the circum-

stance in the first instance. It would have saved much pain to all parties."

"But when shall I see her?" exclaimed Bernard.

"She has not risen yet," answered Charlotte, "and probably will not till near dinner-time, as she has had little rest during the night. I think perhaps you had better call again in a few hours."

"Indeed," said the lover, "I have nothing that requires my attention; and if I had, I feel too anxious respecting Alicia, to think of any thing else: so, if you please, I will wait here till she rises."

Charlotte appeared confused at this proposition; and, after some hesitation, strongly recommended him to withdraw.

"Under existing circumstances," she continued, "Alicia will have no rest till she is sure that you are not in the house. You cannot be surprised at her uneasiness, when you recollect the occurrences of yesterday, to say nothing of

the strong reasons we have for suspecting that you have been present on other occasions, when we thought we were alone."

Nothing could have been more mortifying and alarming to poor Bernard, than thus to find himself an object of suspicion and terror, where he had so recently been used to confidence and affection. But the young lady would not relax from the point; and he was consequently shown to the door, and let out, all in the regular way, by a servant; and then his visible progress across the square was attentively watched, ere she ventured to leave the window, and return to the chamber of her bewildered friend.

It is far from our intention to propose Miss Alicia Storer as a pattern for all young ladies. There are many, we firmly believe, among the British fair, both married and single, who would experience little uneasiness if their husbands and lovers were endued with the same power as that possessed by Bernard Audrey.

Such confidence indicates a rectitude of conduct and principle much to be admired. Yet it may be a question, whether, if the proposition of invisibility were regularly put to the vote, the majority of the fair beings would not give it against our receiving any addition to the means we already possess of penetrating into their secrets.

Alicia had never doubted that she was perfectly in love with Bernard ;—not desperately ; because there had been no opposition—that *sine quâ non* for the concocting of your outrageous, romantic, neck-or-nothing attachments. All was settled and arranged, calmly and clearly, by her father and Sir William ; and nothing like any “objection” had arisen on her part. The young Oxonian had quietly glided through his preliminary degrees of acquaintance, friend, and lover, till, in the character of a regular professor of the amatory art, he sat installed, as we have seen on a recent occasion, in the same chair with herself.

Nothing of all this could have happened unless a deep impression had been wrought within the breast of the young lady, and that impression it was, which, at the crisis we have arrived at, she was endeavouring to get rid of.

After the subsiding of her first alarm, reason told her that it would be madness to tie herself for life to so mysterious a being as her lover had shown himself to be. A thousand vague, and, perhaps, ridiculously terrific pictures of the future haunted her pillow, and among the rest, were certain of the hereditary invisible horrors suggested by poor Emily.

The morning came, and she was feverish and undecided, but leaning much withal toward the dismissal of our hero, and occasionally wishing that some one would take the affair in hand, as she dreaded the result of an interview with him.

On his arrival, she hinted as much to Charlotte; but that young lady did not think fit to take such responsibility upon herself, till the

parents of her friend had been consulted : and so, after the visible departure of the victim of invisibility, Mrs. Storer was summoned to the chamber council, and duly informed of all the appalling particulars.

Without expressing any opinion, or losing a single moment, she despatched a messenger into the city, with a note to her husband, requesting him to come home immediately, as something had happened which threatened the happiness of their daughter.

The worthy merchant returned forthwith, heard the strange story, and, at first, thought poor Ally delirious ; but, when Charlotte related what she likewise had witnessed, and he was made to understand that Bernard was the hero of the bell-pulling hoax, (which he had bribed another person to acknowledge,) and had, on the preceding day, entered his house, tripped up the maid-servant's heels, and lurked about unseen, listening to private conversation, he was most especially astonished and indignant.

“ Devil’s doings,” he exclaimed,—“ no wonder he took to lying. See it all—compact Heard of such things before—didn’t believe ’em, though—don’t know why not, though. What’s happened once may happen again. No more to do with him. Bad job. Never mind, Ally ! Good fish in the sea as ever came out. Look sharper next time. Pull his ears at first starting, eh ? Precious story—hem ! Good thing you found it out in time, though.”

There was some more regular conversation afterwards, the result of which was that Alicia gave the entire disposal of herself, and the management of the affair, into the hands of her parents.

Soon after matters were thus arranged, our hero came again to inquire after his mistress, and was shown into the drawing-room, where, greatly to his surprise, instead of Miss Read, the straightforward merchant, in a few minutes, made his appearance.

“ Morning, Sir,” said he, “ morning—sit

down—no ceremony—little business to settle—won’t take long—mind’s made up—no difficulty then.”

“ I presume, Sir,” said our hero, “ that your daughter has made you acquainted with the communication which I felt myself bound to confide to her. Indeed I had no wish that she should conceal it from you ; and I am sure that your candour and good sense will show you that I am far more to be pitied than blamed.”

“ Ha ! hem !” exclaimed Mr. Storer, “ pitied, eh ? not blamed ? hem !—no harm in telling lies ! killing a poor woman, whose life you might have saved by speaking the truth ! bribing a poor fellow—suffering me and every body to call him a rascal, when you knew he was innocent—making mischief between Ally and her friend—sneaking into my house—prying into secrets, playing tricks with the maids, eh ?—not to be blamed, eh ? wonder *who* is then !”

Bernard, on this ticklish occasion, recollected the merchant’s adage respecting the policy of

tickling any old animal whose young one you wished to make off with ; and therefore replied, “ Surely, Sir, you have not given yourself time to think the matter over coolly ; or your excellent judgment and usual candour would have shown you that I have never used my gift with any improper motives, and that I have, to the utmost of my power, made compensation to those who have been injured, by events which it was impossible for me to foresee.”

“ Hark’ee, young gentleman,” said Mr. Storer, “ no use humbugging me with ‘ candour’ and ‘ judgment’ and all that. Got my share, suppose—no matter for that, though. Fact is—sold yourself to the father of lies. Made pretty good progress too.”

“ Indeed, Sir,” exclaimed Bernard, “ you are wrong there ! There was no compact.”

“ Phoo, phoo ! don’t tell me,” continued the merchant,—“ don’t believe a word of it. His maxim’s the same as the countryman’s, ‘ never

do nothing for nothing for nobody.' A'n't you obliged to tell lies! to be sure. If not—it's worse still ; then they must all be to please yourself. Precious lot of 'em been telling lately, too ! One upon t'other—like the East India warehouses. No use saying more—been deceived in you—all up now—no spite against you—sorry you've fallen into such clutches—wish you well out of 'em—can't help you, though—quite out of our line—no more to say—only would just as soon think of letting Ally marry the Pope."

Our hero still continued to advocate his own cause most manfully, by moving appeals to the justice and candour of his father-in-law that was to have been, and by describing the inextinguishable nature and Vesuvian ardour of his passion.

All were in vain ! his rhetorical tropes and pathetic flourishes were replied to by the merchant's irregular volleys of disjointed sentences, briskly discharged, and galling beyond measure.

Finding, at length, that he could make no impression, and that his feelings were gradually getting the better of that prudence with which he had resolved to conduct the controversy, Bernard determined to withdraw, and leave his case to be argued by Sir William, whom he doubted not to interest warmly in his favour.

Mr. Storer said that he must always be happy to see the worthy Knight, either at his own house or elsewhere; and then there was a very ceremonious leave-taking between him and our hero, who was strictly watched across the threshold, down the steps, and for a considerable distance, as he walked, slowly and down-cast, along one side of the square, to meet his cabriolet which was in waiting.

On that day he dined alone with his uncle; and, in the course of a long, dismal evening, related the full and particular account of past occurrences and his present change of prospects.

It has been already said that Sir William was an invalid, and one of those who appear to be ever leaning upon medical aid for the sup-

port of a tottering existence. But the brilliant prospects opened for his nephew, and the probable realization of his long-cherished dreams, in the revival of his family's ancestral honours, had cheered his spirits in a marvellous degree: and the cheerfulness of his spirits had wrought correspondent wonders on his shattered frame, so that many of his friends made use of an old expression, and said that he "had taken a new lease." What he was doomed to hear that evening, however, soon made the said "new lease" a very questionable tenure. He listened, as if in a dream, to all that Bernard said—rubbed his eyes—roused himself—experienced an uncomfortable, chill, thrilling sensation—took an extra glass of wine or two—stirred the fire—and then shut his eyes and appeared to be asleep. When Bernard, under that impression, hesitated in his narrative, he merely said, "Go on—I hear you.—Let me know *all*;" and remained in the same position.

When the long and strange tale was ended,

he opened his eyes, and turning them, with an agonized expression, on his nephew, he said, “Tell me the truth, Bernard! Did you not make use of some incantations to produce the appearance of this singular being whom you mention? I am not, I trust, weakly superstitious; but I cannot forget certain extraordinary passages in my early life, when I was in the East. Tell me the truth?”

Bernard assured him that he had no knowledge of conjuring, and had merely given vent to the expression of his foolish wish from absolute want of thought or intent, and certainly without the most distant notion that it could or would be granted.

Then followed a rehearsal of disappearances and apparitions, and as Bernard pulled himself in and out of sight, he again endeavoured to talk lightly of the singular property bestowed upon him, and declared his resolution never again to make use of it upon any frivolous occasion, nor in an unworthy manner. “The

lessons which I have already received," he continued, "are more than sufficient to warn me against the danger of any experiments with such an unnatural power. I would gladly divest myself of it, if I knew how."

Sir William had risen, much agitated, from his chair, and paced the room several times, in silence. He then said, in a deep and determined, though feeble voice, "Bernard! It grieves me to tell you, that, after what has passed, and what I have just witnessed, I cannot believe you. There *must* have been some accursed sorcery — some horrible compact in this affair. Do not answer me in your present frame of mind. You are, even now, under the influence of the tempter, or you could not treat with levity those diabolical transformations which are enough to make the blood of every Christian run cold within him. It is evident that the fiend has acquired dreadful power over you, from the multitude of falsehoods which you have been guilty of since this mysterious trans-

action,—*you*, who were *never* previously known to deviate from the most rigid line of truth. I feel myself too unwell to continue our conversation longer to-night. We shall meet, I suppose, as usual, at breakfast in the morning."

Bernard felt the old Knight's hand tremble within his as he wished him a good night ; and then he repaired to his own chamber, to brood over the eventful chapter of accidents which had occurred during the day. His principal consolation arose from the exceedingly high opinion, which, in common with most young men of his age, he entertained of his own superior personal merit and recommendations towards the fair sex. It was inconceivable to him that Alicia should consent to give him up ; and, if her father obstinately persisted, nothing could be easier than to carry on a clandestine correspondence, and avail himself of invisible interviews.

There was something very exciting in all this ; and, notwithstanding the sombre cast of his prospects at that period, he really con-

trived to find some amusement in tracing out a series of adventures, by which he should outwit the wary old merchant, and carry his daughter off in triumph to Gretna.

In the morning he had a brief interview with his uncle, who felt himself too unwell to leave his room. He again besought the young man to confess the means by which he had succeeded in raising the foul fiend ; and again Bernard assured him, upon his honour, that he was no conjuror, but merely the victim of a ridiculous wish. Sir William groaned, sighed, shook his head mournfully, and desired to be left alone.

In the course of the morning the Knight was visited by Mr. Storer, who remained with him for more than two hours ; but our hero was not summoned to the conference.

Left thus to himself, he resolved to drive boldly to Russell Square, and inquire after Alicia's health. He was somewhat surprised at being freely admitted, and made his way up into the drawing-room, as usual.

In a few minutes Mrs. Storer entered, and, after curtseying distantly, and with somewhat ludicrous symptoms of alarm, requested to be informed of the cause of her being honoured with so unexpected a visit. Bernard said something of the extreme anxiety he felt on Miss Storer's account, and expressed a confident hope that his candour, in confessing a misfortune, which he might have kept to himself, would not, eventually, operate to his disadvantage, and then proceeded with the same sort of "tickling" process towards the mother as he had previously used with the father.

But the good lady was a straightforward, duty-performing, unargumentative sort of person, neither to be moved nor turned aside from her path by tickling, flattery, flummery, nor, what her husband called, "humbug;" and, in the present instance, her spouse had furnished her, as he said, with "sailing directions," by which he well knew, from experience, she would strictly abide. She therefore said, "I

am very sorry for what has happened to you, Mr. Audrey; I certainly never suspected anything of the kind, or you may suppose you never would have been on the familiar footing with us all which you have been. But now it is found out there's an end of the business, of course, and Alicia is gone into the country to be out of your way. It's not worth while fretting about the matter, as what's done can't be undone; and, as you've a good fortune, and so on, I dare say you will soon find somebody you'll like just as well. But it's of no use for you to think any more of our daughter, for I am sure nothing will ever induce Mr. Storer to give his consent."

Bernard demurred, pleaded, argued, and spoke of the vehemence of his attachment to Alicia, in the usual strain of disappointed lovers, vowing that he should never know happiness again, and so forth. Mrs. Storer observed that she had heard such things said before by people who, notwithstanding, were

living and doing very comfortably, and were not a bit the worse, but perhaps rather the better, for the little disappointments they had met with. After a few more passionate exclamations, Bernard added, "But surely, Madam, you will allow me to hear my doom from Miss Storer herself?"

"*That* is quite out of the question, for the present at least," replied the lady, in a calm and decided tone; "she is gone into the country, as I said before, on purpose not to be teased."

"Can I not write to her? You will surely favour me with her address?" exclaimed the discarded lover.

"I really don't know it at present," replied the cautious mother: "I have perfect confidence in her and the friends by whom she is accompanied, and they are gone, as I said before, purposely to be out of the way for a little while. So, you see, it is of no use to ask me any more questions, as I have told you all I

know. In fact, my husband is determined to break off the connexion, and my rule is never to differ with him in opinion: we never have two minds on any subject."

As all Bernard's subsequent attempts to wheedle and coax her into some sort of compromise were equally ineffectual, they are not worth relating. As well might a young newly-fledged hawk have essayed to ogle an old hen out of the brood beneath her wings at the barn-door, as he to move the mother of Alicia from her steadfast and exclusive purpose.

It is painful to record that, on taking leave, he scarcely treated her with due respect, and no sooner mounted his cabriolet than he drove off furiously, vowing that fifty such foolish fathers and mothers should not keep him from the object of his affections.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE interview between Sir William Audrey and Mr. Storer in the chamber of the former was one of painful interest to both. The old Knight felt that he could not complain of his friend's decision, as it was not to be expected that any man would, willingly, condemn his only daughter to spend her life with so mysterious a character as his nephew had suddenly become.

“Can’t be,” said the merchant, “can’t be—very sorry for it—feel it much, *very* much—more than I should like young Flit-away and *Co.* to know. Feel for you, too, Sir William. Terrible disappointment all sides!—Hearts set upon it—Baronetcy—seat in Parliament—pro-

mising young man—poor dear Ally all right—no joke, neither, what you and I could have done for 'em between us.—All up!—No use saying the old ones had no hand in it! Cloven foot plain as King's mark at the Custom House."

"Alas! my dear Sir," groaned Sir William, "we appear to have drawn the same conclusion. I am not superstitious, but I cannot forget certain passages of my earlier life, when in India. I remember once a Bramin—"

"Recollect the circumstance," exclaimed Mr. Storer, who had been too much with nabobs not to dread such a beginning, "told it me t'other day. Something of same sort happened to most of my friends; no denying facts,—what every body says must be true. Bramins spawn of old Egyptian conjurors that withstood Moses, look upon't;—Aaron's rod—serpents—frogs—lice—all that—remember, eh?"

Sir William groaned, and throwing his head back in his easy-chair, while his hands rested

upon the arms, said, in a solemn manner, “That Bramin appeared to me last night in my sleep, and reminded me of the tenor of his words, uttered thirty years ago, long before my nephew was born. He said, and I remember it perfectly, that danger to my race was threatened by the ear; but I took the expression figuratively, and imagined it referred to evil counsellors and false friends, and no man has been more careful than myself in the selection of both. But the decrees of fate will be fulfilled, in spite of all our caution. A friend of mine, who was with me at the time, was warned against the delusions of the eye, but it was in vain, for after realizing a handsome fortune, and living single and respected till he was between fifty and sixty, he was allured to marry a young woman, of whom I speak most charitably when I say she had nothing but her beauty to recommend her. Poor fellow! her pranks brought him to an untimely end.”

“Ay, ay,” said Mr. Storer, “good wife

capital ; ‘crown to her husband,’ Solomon says—mine to wit, eh? Don’t think women bad generally ; men’s fault mostly when they are. When they *are* bad, though, proper devils, eh? Known one or two in my time—drive a man mad, Sir ; don’t know what I should have done tied to one of ‘em. No running away—come after you—kettle at a dog’s tail. Well, well, you’ve kept out of *that*, Sir William.”

“ I know not,” sighed the old Knight, “ whether, in not marrying, I have acted either wisely or well. It is a dreary thing, Mr. Storer, to be *alone* in the world in one’s latter days. You have your family comforts at home, and your mercantile connexions and engagements to employ your mind. The different manner in which this disappointment affects us proclaims the advantages which you possess over me: your confidence and troubles are participated and solaced by those whom you love and esteem ; and one part of your extensive and varied horizon is no sooner clouded than the sun shines and opens fairer prospects in a dif-

ferent quarter. I have none ; all is dark, dark. This youth, on whom my only hopes were built, on whom my heart was fixed, is irrecoverably lost. I allude not now to the sin of first entering into that compact (which I tremble to name), so much as to its consequences. I cannot conceal from myself that his character is lost. Liars have always been the most detestable of human creatures to me ; I never knew one who did not, eventually, prove himself fully to merit the hatred and contempt of his species. Look at the series of falsehoods and deceit which this youth has been studiously practising upon us. Can I suppose he has confessed *all*? That is impossible. I did hope that they might be a sort of tribute, extracted from him by the mysterious power with which he has leagued himself ; but he affirms the contrary. Therefore they must be the volition and delight of his now debased mind, and the spirit of the father of lies must have taken possession of him."

"Hope not—not for good, at least," said the

kind-hearted merchant, determined to comfort the invalid, if possible; “drive him out somehow. Hope; mustn’t give it up, Sir William. Don’t think too much of the Bramin—dreams all humbug—blue-devils’ work that—serve me so sometimes when get the gout.”

Sir William shook his head dolefully, and replied, “It is impossible for me to think slightly of dreams. I could tell you some strange passages in my own experience, if it were worth while to attempt to convince you: but, perhaps, it is better not. In the present case, however, what I witnessed last night in my sleep, was but the vivid repetition of a scene, which formerly took place, in the idolatrous subterranean temple of Elephanta. The whole was recalled to my mind, and the mysterious prophecy made clear by its fulfilment. What we call dreams, indeed, are always representations of something we have witnessed—and the only difference between those of our waking and sleeping hours is, that the mind takes the

lead in the one case, while, in the other, it passively waits to see what will be next presented to its view. In both instances, however, the images are borrowed from the past. We never dream of what we never saw."

"Beg your pardon there!" exclaimed Mr. Storer—"never saw a mermaid in my life! Dreamt, though, that one of my ships came home, manned, or maided, or womaned, or fished by 'em, just as you please to call it. There they were—clinging by their tails to the ropes, masts and yards, hallooing to one another and calling 'yo ho!' and all that, just like regular Jack tars. What d'ye think of that, Sir William?"

At any other period the worthy shipowner's intent of raising a smile, to the discomfiture of the blue devils, might have succeeded; but the poor hypochondriac Knight was not so easily to be diverted from the gloomy train of thought into which his mind had settled. He proceeded seriously to argue, that the aforesaid nau-

tical mermaids were not creatures of the dreamer's imagination, inasmuch as he must have seen them represented in paintings, and read of them in books.

For a while Mr. Storer was pleased to find that the invalid could feel an interest in any theory, hoping he might, thereby, be prevented from brooding upon his recent disappointment : but it soon appeared that the two subjects were inseparable. Like most people who are fond of repeating that they are not given to superstition, Sir William had, even in his most active days, a strong undercurrent of feelings, for which it would be difficult to find a more appropriate name. The prophecy of the Bramin was no new source of uneasiness. For years, while riches were accumulating, and his harvests were ripening, and all around was clear as the blue Italian sky—a cloud would, ever and anon, raise its dark, speck-like head, above the distant horizon—then disappear ; and again, peep forth from a different quarter. Latterly, how-

ever, these misgivings had all but entirely forsaken him ; and, therefore, when the aforesaid long-dreaded, but now unwatched cloud arose, darkly congregated, and spread itself into a storm, and burst suddenly upon him, destroying all his fairest hopes and prospects, he felt as if struck by the remorseless hand of fate. What he had long expected had rushed upon him, at a moment when he thought all danger at an end. It could be no marvel that, under such circumstances, he should think and dream of the Bramin, and connect his ambiguous prophecy with its apparent fulfilment.

The unsophisticated merchant was surprised, grieved, and alarmed, at what he heard ; and, after taking leave, resolved, contrary to his former intention, to seek another interview with our hero, in order to urge upon him the propriety of obtaining the best medical advice for his uncle.

For this purpose he waited at the hotel till the young man's return from Russell Square,

as has been observed before, not in the very best of all possible humours.

“ Hark’ye, Squire,” said Mr. Storer, as soon as they were alone, “ don’t bear malice. Sorry for you—said so before. Something of more consequence now though. Been talking to Sir William. Poor gentleman ! Light-headed, I’m afraid. Horribly out of sorts, at all events. Great responsibility on your shoulders, young gentleman—mind that. Never forgive yourself if any thing happens—eh ? Should think not. Recommend Doctor Clearbrain, and Doctor Chaseblue. Doctor Humstrum Dot-andgo no use—know whom I mean, eh ?—See you do. Well, well—Don’t lose a moment, that’s a good fellow ; know you won’t. Don’t bear malice—not a bit : can’t forget what’s past. Glad to hear when you’ve got out of the old un’s clutches. Bad job—can’t be helped—very sorry—must mind one’s own duty though. Send for the Doctors directly—or I’ll call upon ‘em both if you like—eh ?”

“Do you really consider my uncle in danger, Sir ?” asked Bernard, in much agitation.

“Do indeed,” replied Mr. Storer, “very great danger—body and mind too. Talks of Bramins and prophecies—all about you though, and you know what. That’s the main-string all hangs by. No use trying to comfort him. Won’t listen to reason. Full of dreams and all that—sleeping and waking, all one. Must be gone though. Wanted in the city—only wouldn’t leave till I’d seen you.”

Alarmed as our hero now felt respecting his uncle, he could not let slip the opportunity of again requesting that he might be permitted to have one interview,—a farewell interview, if it must be so, with Alicia. The only answer which he could extract from Mr. Storer was, “One thing at a time. Get Sir William well first. See about it then. Ally’s a good girl. Depends on her a good deal. Don’t know that I should object. Can’t say though, for certain. Think about it. Get Sir William well *first*

though. There's my carriage. Call, as I pass, on Doctor Chaseblue. Morning—morning. No use losing time. Understand one another—that's enough.'

From that time, all that medical skill and attention could effect was done for poor Sir William. At first the physicians, being of opinion that he should not be too much alone, conceived that the company of his nephew would be the most agreeable; but that mistake was soon, accidentally, discovered, by the patient's increased nervous agitation, as the young man entered the room and approached him.

The gentleman who made this discovery was much surprised and shocked, as it was known that Sir William was a person of great wealth, and his nephew was the heir to all he possessed; and, apparently, conducted himself with the greatest propriety and feeling towards his uncle.

Under these circumstances the medical man alluded to consulted with his brethren in at-

tendance, and when each had separately taken an opportunity of ascertaining the extraordinary fact, our hero became an object of suspicion and distrust with the whole. All agreed that he must have been guilty of something very shocking ; and the conjectures formed respecting the nature of his crime were various, and, of course, all very far from the truth. A physician undertook the delicate task of introducing the subject to the patient, who, for a moment, looked surprised ; and then, giving way to his feelings, exclaimed,

“ Ay, Doctor, there’s the rub ! But, hush ! Are you sure he is not in the room ?”

“ There is no danger of intrusion, Sir William,” observed the physician. “ Mr. Smith, the apothecary, has expressly undertaken the charge of holding him in conversation till I leave you, and will take care that he does not go out of his sight.”

“ My dear Sir !” exclaimed the patient with unusual animation, “ I know not how to thank

you sufficiently. I fancy him always watching me. Last night, as I lay restlessly awake, I am almost certain he stole into my room. Would that he had never been born!"

The worthy Doctor, shocked beyond measure at what he heard, assured his patient that it was far from his wish to pry into any family secrets; "But," he continued, "it is my duty to tell you, Sir William, that your restoration to health greatly depends upon your mental tranquillity; and, therefore, if any thing which I can do may tend to promote *that*, I trust you will not hesitate to command me."

The patient seemed much affected, and, after expressing the warmest gratitude, declared he could not be happy till he had a private interview with his lawyer, during which it would be absolutely necessary that some one, who could be depended upon, should keep a close watch over his nephew, and not for a moment let him go out of sight.

This singular and ominous commission was,

in due course, adroitly executed. The lawyer came and went, and had three subsequent interviews with Sir William, while our hero, supposing him to be engaged merely with his medical advisers, was, unsuspectingly, detained under the surveillance of the aforesaid Mr. Smith, the apothecary.

A certain degree of relief was evidently afforded to the patient's mind by this transaction; but the oppressive weight still remained, gradually breaking down his already shattered constitution. With the obliquity of mental vision common to hypochondriaes, he believed the Bramin of Hindostan and the mysterious stranger who had appeared to his nephew, were the two agents appointed by fate to work the downfall and destruction of his family. He beheld them in visions by night, and sometimes imagined he caught a glimpse of them by day, stealing about in his chamber.

Setting aside all self-interested hopes and expectations, Bernard had always felt the utmost

respect and warmth of gratitude towards his uncle. It was therefore most painful for him to discover from his own observations, as likewise by hints from the physician, that his presence was not desirable in the sick chamber. It was true that Sir William had never said so much in words ; but his averted looks, agitated manner, and general demeanour were not to be mistaken. The consequence was many hours of gloomy solitude for both parties, the invalid suffering as just stated, and the nephew venting his maledictions on the pale-faced stranger, who, by his insidious gift, had succeeded in separating him from his mistress, and alienating him from his uncle.

In one of these reveries it struck him that, if he could but recover the former, all might yet be well ; and, finding that Sir William was in no immediate danger, he resolved instantly to commence a pursuit which he had deferred, merely from anxiety on his uncle's account.

As Alicia's most intimate friend was Miss

Read, and her relations lived at Clapham, he determined to begin his inquiries there ; and, therefore, booked himself by one of the stages, with the hope of picking up information by the way from some of his fellow-passengers.

It was now winter—long nights—dreary days—and muddy roads. All these are, as all the world knows, in perfection in the vicinity of the Metropolis. The stage contained, most fortunately, as Bernard thought, among a silent set, one very garrulous old lady, who knew every body in Clapham, and the Reads among the rest. She answered all his questions, anticipated others, and told him that she was pretty sure they had “company” staying in the house, as she had seen their carriage full of ladies that morning. All this was very satisfactory, as was likewise her kindness in pointing out the house on their arrival at her journey’s end, when she took leave and entered her own snug little tenement.

“ Where would you like to be set down

Sir?" asked the coachman, when about to shut the coach-door.

Bernard, not being prepared with any other answer, and unused to the ways of "the short stages," replied, "anywhere—at the inn you drive to."

Jehu touched his hat and mounted the box.

"I thought you said you were going to Mr. Read's?" said a thickset, vulgar-looking, though well-dressed elderly man, who had not spoken a word previously all the way.

"You must have misunderstood me, Sir," replied Bernard; "I have not the pleasure of knowing him, though I have met some of his family at the house of a friend."

"Humph!" grunted the stranger; and not another word passed, till he also was deposited at his own gate, as he passed into which he said something in a low tone to the coachman. And so, by degrees, the rest of the passengers were dropped, and then the vehicle came to a stand-still, at a public house, of no very inviting

appearance, which they had passed some quarter of an hour before.

Bernard alighted, paid his fare, and declined the courteous invitation of Boniface to walk in and take “summut.” Though not more than three o’clock, the “best part of the day” was evidently gone by; yet still he thought he should have light enough to reconnoitre the premises, and perhaps to catch a sight of the young ladies. A narrow lane, between two high walls, which separated Mr. Read’s garden from that of his neighbour, offered a snug retreat for the performance of his invisible operations. So, without hesitation, he entered it, walked a few steps, pulled his left ear, and returned unseen.

The house, which he was now about to visit by stealth, stood back about fifty yards from the road, between which and it was a shrubbery, thickly planted, to ensure that snug privacy so much desired in the neighbourhood of London. Regular admission was to be ob-

tained only by ringing a large bell, suspended over a massy brick column, on one side of a pair of strong wooden gates, furnished with a wicket for pedestrians. Bernard, however, resolved rather to climb the iron palisades which ran along the rest of the front, and after some difficulty accomplished his purpose. He then walked up to the house, which was not built at all to his mind, the parlour-windows being so high from the floor as scarcely to allow of his peeping in. “I must contrive to get inside while it is light,” thought he, “or I shall not be able to see her.”

Scarcely had he come to this decision, when the great bell announced that there was some one at the gate; and, after the lapse of a few seconds, a footman came out of the front door of the house, which he left open, and ran along the gravel sweep to perform the duty of janitor.

Nothing could be more opportune, Bernard thought; so, without hesitation, he ascended the half dozen steps, entered the mansion, and,

ere the servant returned, had ascertained that there was no person in either of the two front parlours ; but as the last he walked into had a blazing fire and other tokens of recent occupation, he resolved to ensconce himself there, and watch the progress of events.

As he was warming his hands, the door was thrown open, and he heard a gruff voice, saying, “ Tell your mistress that I won’t detain her five minutes, but I’ve something very particular to say, and must see her.”

The speaker then entered the room, and Bernard recognised his silent fellow-passenger, who had so bluntly inquired if he was not coming to Mr. Read’s. He placed a chair on the hearth-rug, threw himself into it, exclaiming, “ Humph !” and then sat looking into the fire, without moving hand or foot, or uttering another word, till the lady of the house made her appearance. He then half rose from his chair, and, as she was seating herself upon the sofa, said, “ I suppose you are surprised to see me

here at this time o'day : but I told our folks to put the dinner back a bit, for I couldn't be easy till I'd seen you.

“ Nothing particular the matter, I hope, Mr. Sims ?” inquired the lady.

“ That 's as it may happen, Ma'am,” was the reply ; “ I suppose you expect Mr. Read home presently ?”

“ No,” said the lady ; “ he will probably be late to-night, as he and Charles dine with a friend in town.”

“ Well, Ma'am, then I must put you on your guard,” continued the citizen. “ There was a very suspicious character came down in the stage with me to-day, and all the way along was making inquiries about your family. The fellow was well-dressed, as many of them fellows are ; but, from his manners, which I always go by, I shouldn't think he 'd ever rode inside a stage before, and did it to pick up what he could. And that foolish, chattering, old woman, Mrs. Thompson, must

needs tell him every thing about you, and show him your house into the bargain."

Mrs. Read did not appear much alarmed, and suggested that probably the stranger might be some acquaintance of her son's.

"Not a bit of it, Ma'am," said Mr. Sims ; "not a bit of it ; as you may suppose, when I tell you he was watched going down your lane pretty near half an hour ago, and hasn't come back since—so he is most likely reconnoitring your back premises now, and that's why I came. I set the ostler of the Pig and Broom-stick to keep a sharp look-out, and if your people do the same, we shall nab him. Don't go to frighten yourself, Ma'am : forewarned—forearmed, you know."

But the poor lady was very much alarmed, and begged neighbour Sims to issue any orders he thought proper ; and, moreover, if he could make it convenient, to remain where he was, and take his dinner with her and two young ladies. To this proposition the bluff citizen

somewhat reluctantly consented ; and then, summoning Mr. Read's footman and gardener, he went out with them, to adopt such precautionary measures as he thought fit against the intended attack.

The mention made of "two young ladies," was quite sufficient to decide Bernard upon keeping his ground ; and with the conviction that he should soon see Alicia and her friends, he felt more amused than mortified at the suspicions to which his conduct had given rise.

Under the direction of Mr. Sims, every door and window about the premises was carefully secured with bolts, bars, and bells, so nicely poised as to give the alarm at the smallest motion.

The next scene was dinner, to which the gallant protector came puffing and blowing like a porpoise. The cloth had been hastily laid in the room where Bernard was ; and the lady made an apology to her guest on that account.

" All the same to me, Ma'am," said he ; " no matter about the room ; good company and

good cheer, that's all I care for. But where are the young ladies?"

"They'll be here directly," replied Mrs. Read; "but we will not wait for them, as I know it is beyond your usual hour."

"Pretty peckish, I must own, Ma'am," said Mr. Sims, taking his seat without farther ceremony.

"So am I," thought Bernard; and he almost regretted not having accepted the "summut" at the Pig and Broomstick; but comforted himself with the hope of stealing a hasty meal from the sideboard.

A moment after, however, his appetite was nearly destroyed, by the entrance of two young ladies who were utter strangers to him. They took their seats, bowed, and were introduced to Mr. Sims, who did the honours of his end of the table, in the style of one who never forgets number one; saying little, but making up, by deeds, for the paucity of his words.

Bernard was excessively provoked, and

wished himself safe out of the house ; for not a word was said to throw the smallest light on the object of his search. In his vexation he had allowed the soup and fish to be carried out of the room. A leg of mutton then was taken direct from the table to the kitchen, for the benefit of the gardener and an extra watchman called in on this perilous occasion ; so the only substantial thing which the hungry, invisible gentleman, could seize upon, was a turkey's leg, which he picked clean, after the manner of canine animals, and quenched his thirst with a glass of porter.

In vain he lingered and listened, with the hope of hearing something of Alicia or Charlotte. Their names were not even mentioned, and he was about to commence his retreat, when Mrs. Read, having a knowledge of her guest's habits, proposed to the young ladies that they should retire with her, and leave Mr. Sims to his afternoon's nap. The gentleman thought this exceedingly kind ; and de-

clared that ten minutes would be amply sufficient.

Bernard might have contrived to slip out with the ladies; but a vulgar idea took possession of him at the moment. The tempting dessert was yet upon the table; the weather was cold, and he thought a glass of wine would do him good. So he remained where he was; and as soon as Mr. Sims settled himself for a nap, took a seat, and began to help himself, after the manner of one commencing rather than terminating a hearty meal. Perhaps the whim arose more from the wine he took, than any feeling of anger against his suspicious, unsuspecting, snoring companion; but the temptation to a bit of fun was not to be resisted. In the first place, he resolved to empty the decanters, and if possible, to clear away the whole of the dessert, that neighbour Sims might have the credit of both exploits. The only difficulty he apprehended was the want of time; so he set himself to the work

manfully, and, in about half an hour, had more than half completed his task ; and then the sleeper awoke, yawned, and stretched himself, and immediately laid hold of the port, and held it up before the candle, with much surprise and dissatisfaction.

“ Humph !” said he, “ must have forgot myself, I suppose—I thought I’d only had three glasses.”

Bernard was highly delighted, and continued to watch the motions of the gruff old gentleman, who proceeded in silence to draw his chair closer to the fire. He then selected a clean glass, filled it to the brim, and let it stand on the table while he performed the pokerizing process of “ clearing out the bottom of the grate,” and making a cheerful blaze. Bernard snatched the opportunity, emptied the bumper, and returned the glass to its place.

“ Humph !” grunted neighbour Sims, on turning round and seeing the state of things ; “ Humph !” and he began rubbing his eyes, as

if to ascertain whether he was yet awake. Having made up his mind on that point, he took a more particular survey of the decanters, and the state of the table, shook his head, and uttered two or three “Humphs!” which, as afterwards appeared too clearly, meant that he was convinced of the footman’s having paid the room a visit during his nap.

Could our hero have interpreted these ejaculations, he certainly would have proceeded no farther; but, unluckily, he was now just fit for any kind of mischief, and remembering where he had hid the bone of the turkey’s leg, he slipped it into the old gentleman’s coat-pocket, and so laid the foundation for a complaint which deprived a good servant of his place.

Little dreaming, however, that his invisible jokes, however apparently harmless, were working, as usual, serious evil to some one, Bernard continued to amuse himself till certain odd sensations told him that he had taken his quantum of wine in rather too quick time. The wisest

way, under such circumstances, he judged, would be to make his retreat as soon as possible. So, as neighbour Sims sate looking steadily into the fire, he slipped out of the room, and found himself in the hall, which was brilliantly lighted by an immense lamp.

Nothing now remained but to let himself out of the front door. There was a chain to move, and two bolts to draw back: but there was plenty of light, his nervous system was fortified by wine, he felt secure in his invisibility, and, moreover, distinctly heard sounds of merriment proceeding from the distant kitchen. So he went on steadily with his work, and having removed all impediments, turned the key in the massy lock, and was in the act of opening the door, when a catch, of which he was ignorant, set in motion one of those tinkling terrors of housebreakers, a bell.

In an instant the whole house was in an uproar. Screams were heard from the parlour and the kitchen; and scarcely had he got into

the sweep, ere the footman and gardener were at the door, and the latter fired off a blunder-buss at random, the contents of which rattled in the shrubs almost at his side.

Confused and in darkness, he now mistook his path, and soon found himself in the labyrinth of a pleasure-ground and gardens, where he resolved to remain till the alarm was subsided.

In the mean while it evidently increased. The noise of fire-arms had roused the neighbours, and lights were seen, moving about and round the house in all directions. Presently a rough voice was heard calling out—“Keep close together by me, while I let the dogs loose!” This was a species of attack for which our hero was ill prepared, and he determined to make a bold rush to gain the palisades, before it commenced; but scarcely had he run half a dozen yards, ere a snap and a most excruciating pain in his right leg brought him to a stand-still, and he found that he was caught in a man-trap: not

understanding the mechanism of the thing, he hoped to tear its iron jaws asunder, and was using vain efforts for that purpose, and with difficulty repressing the natural outcries of agony, when a huge dog sprang upon him, and governed only by the scent, seized him by the left arm, which he held and pinned to the ground in the same vice-like style as the trap had secured the right leg.

It was now no time for delay or calculation ; and he bawled out lustily for help.

“ Ay, ay, we’re coming, my lad ! Hold him fast, Tiger ! He’s got him !” shouted several voices.

As they approached, Bernard had just sense enough left to recollect that no assistance could be rendered to him in his present state ; so he made himself visible, and was duly released and conducted before Mr. Sims, who recognized him as his suspicious fellow-traveller, and glorified himself not a little on his penetration, and the result of it.

As the prisoner would not answer any questions, nor give any account of himself, he was committed to the charge of three constables, to be conveyed to the cage for that night. On his way there, however, they lost sight of him in a most extraordinary manner. The fact was, that he pulled his left ear, and contrived to hobble along till a coach overtook him, when he scrambled up behind, and had an invisible ride till he reached the outskirts of town.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN the commencement of his invisible career, our hero had first been startled, then uneasy, and at last, became perfectly callous and unmindful respecting the number of his aberrations from truth. But in other points of morality, he continued to be exceedingly, and almost fastidiously punctilious.

At the close of the last chapter, he was stated to have mounted on the back part of a coach. Now the said coach was one of the short stages, which happened to be short of outside passengers, so that he rode alone till it arrived at the well-known Elephant-and-Castle, where he slipped down unseen, and, in the

midst of the confusion and fog, contrived to pull himself into sight without attracting any particular attention at the identical moment: but with the next, he was assailed by the usual outcries:—“ Greenwich !” “ Brighton !” “ City !” “ Deptford !” “ Charing Cross !” &c.

In endeavouring to get clear from the throng, he found himself in a blaze of light, proceeding from torches, carried by a set of active and mischievous boys, bawling out,—“ Light, your honour !”

“ My eyes !” cried one, “ that 'ere gentleman's had a tumble !”

“ Why, you 've broke your leg, Sir !” roared another urchin, flashing his torch close to the unfortunate limb which had been caught in the trap.

“ The arm of your coat 's all tore !” squeaked a third, in like manner, making the damage apparent by the approximation of his light.

“ Vot a Guy !” screamed a fourth; “ vy, he 's kivered with mud !”

It was too evident to Bernard, that the state of his habiliments must attract notice wherever he was seen; and, having no relish for being thus illuminated and exhibited *pro bono publico*, he inquired if a hackney-coach could not be procured? A general cry instantly arose among his officious conductors, and “ Coach! a coach! This way, your honour!” was vociferated on all sides. Hobbling after the lights, he soon found himself at the door of a hack, the steps of which were let down, and he was preparing to mount, when the driver entered his protest against the admission of such a walking abomination into his vehicle. So he was conducted to a second and a third along the line, and in like manner rejected, to the infinite amusement of the aforesaid link-boys. At length, one of the Jarvies, whose coach-lining was little likely to be injured, agreed to receive him upon certain exorbitant conditions, with which he gladly complied. Then came the payment of the boys, a difficult matter to ad-

just, as he had not a sufficiency of small change to satisfy all, and each swore that he was the first, and had called the coach, and so forth.

“ Well, divide this among you !” cried Bernard, throwing a half-crown piece, which, of course, was caught by one of the strongest, and led to a battle, the beginning of which he witnessed as the crazy hack moved off from the stand.

“ What a series of provoking circumstances !” he exclaimed ; and, as he thought them over, it first struck him that he had cheated the stage-coachman out of his fare from Clapham. It could be of no use to return, as the man must have driven off some time before ; and even if he were not gone, how would it be possible to convince him that he had carried a passenger behind, when he had been continually looking round during the short journey, and saw that the back seats were vacant ?

Trifling as this matter was, it annoyed him now, more than if he had told a hundred lies.

There was something so mean, pitiful, and paltry in the idea of cheating a hard-working man out of his due, that he felt lessened in his own esteem, and determined never again to avail himself of the services of any one, during his periods of invisibility, without making ample compensation.

“ Surely,” he concluded, “ I can never become a rogue, a swindler, a fellow devoid of honour? No! I feel that my principles are unchanged. If I have been compelled to adopt some little mystifications now and then, they have been called for by the principle of self-defence; and whatever has occurred, it certainly never was my *intention* to injure any one. Talk of the policy of truth! It may, perhaps, be the best for other men; but for me it has been the worst; since, by rashly adopting it, I am separated from Alicia, and am on more different terms with my uncle than I should have been had I preserved my secret. But, as for dishonesty:—pshaw! There is no

danger of my falling into that, even if I had been anointed a hundred times by that infernal old pale-faced rascal."

It might have been fancy, but at that moment he thought he heard a short cough, like that of the mysterious elderly gentleman, and then a hollow, cackling sort of triumphant laugh close to his ear. The idea of the old fellow's invisibility struck him, and he groped about the coach with the desperate feeling, that, if he could but catch hold of him, he would never quit his grasp till he had compelled him to take back his invisible gift. All search, however, was in vain. If the anointer was there, he must have been intangible as well as inapparent ; and so poor Bernard concluded that his unlucky ears were the dupes of an excited imagination.

On his arrival at the hotel, he was informed by his valet, that Sir William had been much more low-spirited than usual, and that the physician was then with him.

“Let me see the Doctor before he goes,” said Bernard, setting about his toilet, after having accounted for his singular appearance in the usual way, *i. e.* by a falsehood.

It seems that the invalid, soon after missing his nephew, imagined that he had vanished, expressly for the purpose of watching him unseen; and all the poor man’s looks, words, and actions were regulated by that belief, which nothing could have removed save the return of Bernard, and the assurance that he was then dressing in his own chamber.

Previous to this announcement, a strange, and, to the physician, an alarming conversation had taken place between him and the patient, who, convinced that Bernard was in the room, answered each question accordingly. Unluckily, the Doctor had a message from Sir William’s lawyer, to say that he wished much to have another interview with him, for the purpose of explaining some little technical difficulty, relative to instructions given to him on his last visit.

“ He has taken his time, however,” observed Sir William. The Doctor, ascribing this reply to the peevishness of an invalid, remarked with a smile,

“ Nay, my good Sir, do not be uncharitable. It was only the day before yesterday, you know, that he was here, and—”

“ I have not seen him for this month !” exclaimed Sir William.

The Doctor was much startled at this new feature in his patient’s disorder, and fixed his eyes attentively upon him as he continued, “ I allude to the time when Mr. Smith engaged to occupy the attention of your nephew, and—”

Here he was interrupted by the invalid, who, evidently under great excitement, said,

“ I can have no concern with what may pass between my nephew and Mr. Smith. I know that Bernard feels anxious about me ; and it is natural that he should seek information, relative to the state of my health, from Mr. Smith, or any body else that can give it him.

But, never mind such matters. Feel my pulse, Doctor, and tell me how I am to-day."

This may suffice as a specimen of an awkward conference, which had lasted about a quarter of an hour, when the return of our hero in a hackney-coach, and his retirement to his chamber, together with his wish to see the Doctor, were regularly announced.

The change in the patient's manner was instantaneous. The moment the servant had left the room, he addressed the physician, first with an apology for what had already passed, and then continued,

"I had reason to suppose that my nephew was concealed in this room, listening to what passed between us. Do not ask me why I entertain such suspicions. Alas! They are too well founded! I am never certain of privacy, unless some confidential person has him under his eye; and I must trouble you again to get Mr. Smith to perform the same kind office as before, during the proposed interview

with my lawyer. Of course, in future, when you observe any thing particular in my manner, you will know what to attribute it to, and be cautious what you say on any subject save that of your profession. But, now we know we are alone, doctor, I must tell you how much I wish to go to Cheltenham,—without him, of course. I have several old East Indian friends now there, whose society might, perhaps, (though, alas ! it is but a forlorn-hope,) tend to cheer my spirits; and I have, on several previous occasions, found benefit from the waters. But he must not go with me. I feel that I cannot endure this sort of espionage on my most private actions. Even there I shall not be quite free from dread. I must, however, contrive to obtain intelligence, from time to time, where he really is."

The worthy physician attributed this strange dread of being watched, in a great degree, to the nature of the patient's disorder; but still felt convinced that there must have been much

that was wrong in the young man's conduct, to have generated such a suspicion. On taking leave, he rather encouraged the idea of a trip to Cheltenham, and told the Knight that he would think the whole matter over, and endeavour, before the morrow, to devise some plan for keeping his nephew at a distance.

In the mean while our unfortunate hero had been most disagreeably employed in his own room. On removing his boot, with great pain and difficulty, it was found to be nearly full of blood; and, on farther examination, his leg presented a frightful appearance, from the wounds and contusions inflicted by the man-trap, which evidently was not one of that description styled "humane." His arm likewise bore prints of the huge dog's teeth, and the whole of these injuries being somewhat aggravated by subsequent cold, exhibited an aspect by no means promising for his bodily comfort.

As he was pondering over these painful mementos of invisibility, as men are wont when

they meet with an unpleasant something which they do not very well know how to get rid of, the physician was announced.

“Pray walk in, Doctor!” exclaimed Bernard, hastily throwing on his dressing-gown, “do, pray, excuse my undress and take a seat. I will not detain you a moment; but, really, I could not let you go without inquiring after my dear uncle. Pray how do you find him to-day?”

“I think, Sir,” replied the physician, in a measured tone, “he is going on much in the way you wish.”

“I am glad to hear that,” exclaimed our hero; “then he will soon be relieved from all his extraordinary fancies.”

The Doctor could scarcely repress his indignation at what appeared to him the shocking ambiguity of this expression; but, being resolved to forward his patient’s wish, he observed seriously,—

“Sir William certainly is subject to some

extraordinary fancies, but those fancies have a base which is real — an original cause, I fear, beyond the reach of medical skill."

Here there was a pause of perfect silence, during which the two gentlemen eyed each other suspiciously.

" You, no doubt, understand to what, and to whom I allude ?" continued the Doctor.

" I suppose," replied Bernard, " that you allude to me ; and, if my uncle has told you—"

" No," said the physician, interrupting him, " Sir William has told me nothing ; but the symptoms produced by the mere mention of your name, as well as by your presence, are too clearly indicative that your conduct has produced his present state of mind."

For a moment Bernard hid his face in his hands, and then replied,— " If my uncle had told you all, Sir, you would have seen in my case much to pity, and but little to blame. I have been the victim—"

“Excuse me for interrupting you,” said the Doctor, “but I came not here, Mr. Audrey, with any intention of prying into your family affairs ; nor will I consent to hear any particulars respecting them, unless you first give me your assurance, that what you wish to say may probably tend towards the benefit of my patient.”

“No,” observed Bernard, “I do not see how it could produce that effect. Indeed the contrary would probably be the case, as, from his silence to you, it is evident that he wishes to conceal the real state of things. It was only for my own justification that I wished you to understand that whatever grief I may have caused to my uncle, has been in consequence of my being the victim of a designer, concerning whose intentions it was impossible for me to entertain any suspicions, and, consequently, against whom I could not be upon my guard.”

The Doctor made up his mind that the young man had been gambling.

“Alas !” thought he, “this is the old eternal

story of all sinners, of all sorts and sizes, from the young urchin who gets into mischief, and when found out, bawls, ‘I didn’t mean to do it! it wasn’t my fault!’ to the hoary hypocrite, who blasphemously styles the consequences of his misdeeds and folly ‘mysterious providences,’ or attributes them to the direct agency of the Prince of Darkness.”

So thought the Doctor; but neither inclination nor duty prompted him to dive farther into our hero’s mystery; and therefore he was about to take leave, when the victim of the trap and dog addressed him thus:—

“I really am ashamed to speak to you on such a subject, Doctor, because I know it is not a physician’s case; but, perhaps you will have the kindness to tell me whether I ought to call in a surgeon, in consequence of an accident which I met with to-day?”

Thus saying, he exhibited his leg. The physician looked at it, hemmed three or four times, and then, as a sudden thought struck him, said

gravely, “I wish you may be fortunate enough to save the limb, Sir. At all events, not a moment must be lost. Lay your leg up immediately in a chair, and don’t stir hand or foot till the arrival of a surgeon, whom I will call upon and send as my carriage is waiting.”

At this hint poor Bernard uttered a “Humph!” much more energetic than any of those with which Mr. Sims had amused him after dinner that day. His valet was summoned, and the unlucky member was carefully deposited upon pillows, while, as a matter of course, the owner of it fancied himself to be very ill.

The physician hastened away, but not without looking in upon Sir William, and making a communication, which, though of little more than one minute in length, was the cause of his enjoying a comparatively sound night’s rest.

In due time, a veteran and well-known skilful surgeon arrived, properly instructed by the physician in all the outlines of the case, as well

as the method in which, under existing circumstances, he wished it to be treated.

He carefully examined the unlucky leg, shook his head, felt our hero's pulse, and pronounced him to be feverish: which was no especial wonder, after the unusual quantity of wine he had drunk, the perils he had undergone, and the alarm excited by the Doctor's ominous exclamation.

“ I can make neither head nor tail of your account of falling down and hurting yourself in this manner,” said the surgeon, roughly: —“ Where was it? how was it? What did you tumble among—scythes or pitchforks? I shall never cure you if you don't tell me all.”

Bernard made a sign for his valet to leave the room, and then told the surgeon that he had unluckily been caught in a man-trap, while endeavouring to obtain an interview with a young lady, to whose friends his suit was not agreeable. The idea seemed highly to amuse the coarse but worthy practitioner,

who vowed it was a pity that the young lady had not been caught by the clothes in another, as then she must have remained and heard all his lamentations.

Bernard did certainly feel angry at this ill-timed badinage ; but men in a fright concerning their bodily circumstances will bear much from their medical attendant—“the dear doctor” for the time being. So he contrived “to digest the venom of his spleen,” and, as all was to be told, exhibited his arm, and made known the subsequent canine attack.

“Humph!” said the surgeon ; “some people know how to take care of their daughters, however ! I hope the animal was not in a rabid state ? Well, well, we mustn’t alarm you too much : so I’ll just patch and plaster, and bind you up for the night, and you must keep yourself perfectly quiet, both in mind and body, or else it is my duty to tell you that I can’t answer for the consequences.”

“But you do not mean to say that there

can be any danger of my losing my leg?" exclaimed Bernard.

"I can't pretend to pronounce a positive opinion on that subject to-night," replied the relentless spreader of plaisters, which he continued to lay on systematically while speaking; "Much depends upon yourself—But, after all, what is a leg or an arm? You are not obliged to work hard for your bread, you know. I am acquainted with a gentleman who goes fox-hunting with a cork-leg, and they tell me he is always in a good place—he's so much the lighter, at all events. Hallo! what do you mean by that wince? I did but just touch you. That indicates that all is not quite right with the tibia; and what a deuce of a dig the iron has given you just here! If the fibia should be splintered, and any fragments of bone be driven in underneath,—there are some confounded ugly sinews down there, let me tell you:—But I won't bother you with technical terms; mind what I say, and don't attempt to move out

of this room, even if the house should be on fire: and if ever you get caught again, don't go riding about in the cold for half a dozen hours, but get advice at once. I hope we shan't have any mortification, after all; but you've taken the right way to get it, such a night as this. As for the arm—I don't think there's much danger of your losing that. Perhaps it may be what we call a straight one:—there's a rotatory bone, you see, by which we move our hands round—so—I see the dog's teeth have been at work upon that; but the main bone is sound enough—so, if you are sure the brute wasn't mad, and you don't happen to have a locked-jaw, which often follows such injuries, never mind about your arm: all you have got to do, is to keep yourself perfectly tranquil, both in body and mind—particularly the latter. You may take a little water-gruel about your usual hour of going to bed; but nothing else, till I see you again to-morrow: and so, mind and keep up your spirits."

Now, though the leg of a turkey is a very good thing in its place, it seemed but a short allowance “per diem” to a hearty young man of one-and-twenty, who had been riding in and outside of coaches, drinking his bottle and half or two bottles of wine, and taking his exercise, if not his diversion, in the open air ; so, in spite of the basin of water-gruel, poor Bernard went with a most ravenous appetite to bed—not to rest—for disappointment, bodily pain, vexation, starvation, and involuntary recurrence to the various contingencies hinted at by the surgeon, combined to keep him rolling from side to side, as if to find out the softest place.

When, at length, his senses were lulled into a partial stupor, he was startled by hearing, as he thought, close to his pillow, the dry, short cough of the detested, pale-faced, elderly gentleman, against whom he forthwith uttered a variety of imprecations, which served only to arouse his valet, who slept in an adjoining apartment, and convince the poor fellow that his young master was light-headed.

CHAPTER XX.

“ You are really so very much better this morning, that, if you feel disposed to start immediately for Cheltenham, I shall not oppose your wish.”

Thus said the physician to Sir William, on the morning which followed our hero’s Clapham expedition.

“ I wanted a good night’s rest sadly,” replied the Knight, “ and certainly feel myself stronger and more at ease than I have done for some days; but I could not avoid being a little anxious about my nephew. Are you sure that he is not seriously hurt? Though he has forfeited my confidence, I cannot help reflecting

that he is the last of our family, and perhaps, at some future day, long after I am gone——”

“ Nay, nay, Sir William,” exclaimed the Doctor, “ no more of that. You will fall into the old strain. There is really nothing the matter with him except a few scratches, which he told me he got by a fall, but afterwards confessed to the surgeon he received from being caught in a man-trap, while engaged in some adventure of gallantry. In all probability, he will feel himself a little feverish, and out of order this morning, in consequence of his excesses of yesterday ; as it was pretty evident that he had sought consolation at the shrine of Bacchus, for whatever discouragement he might have met with elsewhere. Under these circumstances, a little cooling regimen will do him good, and you may consider him as bound hand and foot for the day.”

“ Alas !” thought the Knight, when left to himself, “ what Storer says is but too true. Lying is ever the beginning of a downward

course. Here is another falsehood!—perhaps more. An affair of gallantry too, and at such a time! And drunkenness! Oh! how different is all this to the state of things before the fatal interview which he described, and which, after all, I much fear was attended with circumstances he has thought proper to conceal. I dread the worst, and cannot believe him. We *must* part, at least for the *present*. But no! I will not lose sight of him. He is the son of my brother—the last hope (alas! scarcely *now* the *hope* even) of our race. I will not forsake him entirely; but to continue, after what has happened, under the same roof with him, is, I feel, more than I can endure."

Having made up his mind to go to Cheltenham, the worthy Knight first despatched a messenger for his lawyer, to whom he gave final instructions concerning certain arrangements of property which had been proposed in their former private interviews.

He then desired to speak with Andrews,

an old servant of the family, who was then officiating as valet to his nephew.

Andrews had always been a great favourite with Sir William, on account of a certain honest bluntness, which even an intercourse with town servants had not sufficed to destroy. He had lived, when a lad, in the service of Bernard's father, after whose decease the Knight kept him about his own person, till the last year of our hero's residence at Oxford, when he was sent there with a couple of horses, a present from the uncle to his *then* darling and hopeful nephew. Nothing could be more natural than that a servant of the father's should become a favourite with the son ; and as Bernard was not, at the time, "exactly suited," he wrote to request that Andrews might be allowed to stay with him "for the present." And in this manner the honest fellow had glided on with his young master's fortunes, into the post of valet, and still belonged to the family.

"How is your master this morning, Andrews?" inquired the Knight.

“ The doctor says he is a good deal better this morning, Sir William,” was the reply: “ but he says he must be kept quite still to-day till the surgeon comes. If I may make so bold, I’m glad to see you so much better.”

“ Thank you, Andrews,” said the Knight; “ I feel myself much stronger and easier to-day.”

“ Thank God for that, any how!” exclaimed the valet; “ I’ve been very uneasy about you lately, Sir. And that’s not all. I wanted to speak to you very much, but I didn’t like to trouble you while you wern’t well.”

“ Nothing particular the matter, I hope?” inquired Sir William; “ if there is, don’t lose any time, as I mean to leave town to-day.”

“ To-day!” exclaimed Andrews. The assertion was repeated, and then he continued:— “ Well, then, Sir, to cut the matter short, all I’ve got to say is, that I should be very much obliged to you, if you’d take me with you; that’s all.”

“ Take you with me!” exclaimed the Knight:

“ What ! and leave your young master ill in bed ?”

“ Why, as to that,” said Andrews, “ I don’t think there’s much the matter with him ; and as you never *regularly* gave me warning, and I always considered you as *really* my master, I hope you’ll be my master still.”

“ Have my nephew and you had any words ?” inquired Sir William.

“ No, your honour,” replied Andrews ; “ nothing of that kind. Only—but—” and not knowing how to proceed, he busied himself about the fireplace.

“ We have been long enough together for you to know that I like people to speak out plainly, and tell what they mean,” observed the Knight.

“ Then, Sir William, if you please, I’d much rather live with you than Mr. Audrey,” said Andrews.

“ And pray,” asked Sir William, “ what may be your reasons for giving me this flattering preference ?”

“ I am but a servant, Sir,” replied Andrews, “ and should be sorry to make mischief in any family, particularly one in which I was bred, as one may say: but it seems to me as there should be confidence between master and man, on both sides, or else it’s no good for ‘em to be together. And, if I must speak out, why, Mr. Bernard’s not what he used to be; and—well, I’ll out with it at once—hang me if I can believe a word he says! He told me last night, that he’d slipped down the step of a hackney-coach, and hurt his leg, and fell with his arm against the wheel; but when the surgeon came, it turned out to be quite different, as I should have known well enough when I began to brush his clothes, which were torn, and all over dirt. And this isn’t the first time. T’other day, he came home with his coat all over flour, and a new hat, which he told me he had changed by mistake; but his other was found in Mr. Storer’s area; and the man in the hatter’s shop, where he bought the new one, told me that he came there without any

hat on his head, and got him to brush his coat a bit: but he couldn't get the marks out, and he thought they looked as if he'd been fighting with a baker. I'm sadly afeard, Sir, as he's got some bad company somewhere, though nobody ever comes near him neither."

The ice being thus broken, a long and confidential conversation took place between Sir William and his old servant; and, after much hesitation, a promise was extracted from the latter, that he would remain with Bernard for the express purpose of letting his uncle know how he went on.

"I mean you not to act exactly as a spy," said Sir William, "but rather as the friend of both parties. I do not wish to hear of his follies or faults; but whenever you observe an alteration for the better, write to me, under cover to Mr. Harleston, my lawyer, whose address I give you. Displeased as I have reason to be with him, I cannot forget that he is my nephew; and you must not forget that

he is the *last* of the family, and the son of your old master."

"There never was a better master, old or young!" exclaimed Andrews; "never could be a better than he was when we were at Oxford, and some time after. I can't, for the life of me, think what 's come to him!"

"It is a mysterious affair, my good fellow," said Sir William; "but I know you will do your duty. Endeavour to gain his confidence. A word from an old servant will sometimes have great weight with a young man. My peace of mind and the state of my health require that we should be separated for a little while. I cannot remain here:—But, mark me, I do not mean to come to any open rupture with him. When I am gone, perhaps he will reflect upon what has passed between us; for I have spoken very plainly to him. It will be a great satisfaction to me to know that I leave him with a faithful friend. If he should be in difficulty, he will probably let me know:

but if he hesitate at such a time, I shall trust to you. Write to me instantly; I have no wish to forsake him in such a case. I believe now we understand each other clearly: but, should any thing farther occur to me, I will put it on paper, and send it to Mr. Harleston's office. As I may, probably, be moving about, I cannot give you my address; but observe,—a letter, if left there for me, will always be forwarded without loss of time."

About three hours after this conference, a note was delivered to our hero, who opened it, and read as follows:—

"DEAR BERNARD,

"The disappointments and anxiety which you have lately caused me, have so far affected my health and spirits, as to render a change of scene and air absolutely necessary. By the advice of my physician, I shall avoid taking a personal leave of you. Indeed, I feel that it would be trying to both; as, *under existing circumstances*, I could not invite you to accom-

pany me. I seek tranquillity, and cannot enjoy that save in solitude, of which I am never assured while under the same roof with *you*. You may, perhaps, deem this *fanciful* and nervous; but my sufferings have been, and are *real*, even on *that* account. But those sufferings, Bernard, are as nothing to what I experience from the melancholy change in your character, which threatens, or perhaps I ought to say, has already destroyed, all my hopes. My mind has naturally been led to think much on your peculiar situation, and it appears to me, that there is but one course for you to pursue with any chance of extricating yourself from the snare. If you have sufficient resolution to make and abide by a solemn oath that you will never again avail yourself of the insidious gift which has been bestowed upon you, all may yet be well. If you cannot make up your mind to this step, I fear that all hope of happiness is at an end for us both. The subject is too painful for me to pursue farther, in my present weak state, both of mind and

body. Think on what I have said, and let me have your determination in three days addressed under cover for me, at Mr. Harleston's. It grieves me thus to part from you, in a manner so very different from all our former partings. But it must be so. Adieu, Bernard, and believe me

“ Your affectionate uncle,

“ WILLIAM AUDREY.”

The perusal of this letter threw our hero into a deep reverie, which was, withal, of a very multifarious and cloudy nature; but, at length, terminated in a resolution of taking the proposed oath, in the most solemn manner, at the expiration of the three days.

The retention of his invisible power, for that brief period, could not, he thought, in any way affect poor Sir William, while it might be useful to him in his endeavour to discover Alicia, whom he was determined to see, and ascertain the real state of her feelings towards him.

The state of his leg and arm next occupied his attention, as they presented serious obstacles to the immediate commencement of any fresh adventure.

When the clock struck four, and the surgeon, who had plastered and bandaged and starved and terrified him since the preceding evening, had not made his appearance, he began to feel seriously uneasy about the possible consequences of neglect. No one, however, was acquainted with the said gentleman's address ; and so, after two more long and dreary hours, another practitioner was summoned to his bedside, who, after removing the aforesaid plaisters and bandages with the utmost care, appeared exceedingly surprised.

“ What is your real opinion, my dear Sir ? ” said Bernard : “ Do not be afraid to tell me ; I have already been prepared for the worst. Do you really think there is any danger of my losing my leg ? ”

“ Lose your leg ! ” exclaimed the surgeon,

“ the man had lost his senses, whoever he was, before he could have talked such nonsense. You may get up and dance about the room, and are just as able as I am. Two or three scratches and a bruise or two—that’s all. And for your arm—it is perfectly ridiculous to tie that up.”

This was excellent news for Bernard, who forthwith inquired if he might venture to take a little soup, or the leg of a fowl, or some slight meal, as he was really suffering from hunger.

“ Soup ! leg of a fowl !” ejaculated the astonished surgeon, “ why, who in the world can you have had to attend you ! You may go and attack a sirloin, or a round of beef, if you like ; it will do you a vast deal more good than lying here by the fireside.”

“ Humph !” thought Bernard, “ I’ve heard that doctors differ, but this is prodigious !” so he told the medical gentleman that his predecessor had been sent by Sir William’s physician, and consequently must be a practitioner of some eminence.

“ Let him be recommended by whom he may,” said the surgeon, “ he is either a knave or a fool ; though, I must confess, that I do not understand his game ; for, if he had wished to make a job of your leg, he would scarcely have been content to administer nothing more powerful than common adhesive plaster. But, perhaps, that was a mistake—however, you are quite well now, and I can transfer you with a clear conscience to the cook. You may let these plaisters remain where they are for a few days, and throw away the bandages, and that is all I have to say in the way of my profession.”

“ This is a strange affair, Andrews,” said Bernard, as soon as the surgeon had taken leave ; “ I shall attend to one part of his advice and have some dinner, however, as my symptoms of hunger are by no means equivocal.”

“ What would you like me to order, Sir ?” inquired the valet.

“ Let me have any thing that they have ready in the house,” replied his master ; “ positively I feel as though I could eat any thing.”

“ I wonder what will happen next ! ” growled Andrews to himself, on his way down-stairs, “ one of these surgeons must be a pretty rascal, and hang me if I know which—but the first was sent by the physician, and that is *some* recommendation any how ; so I’ll take care that young master shan’t get any thing to tempt him to eat too much.”

With this laudable resolution in his mind, he had the good luck to stumble upon a roast loin of pork, one of the very few eatable things against which Bernard had expressed an utter aversion. It was hissing hot from the spit, and served up *instanter*, as he declared that his master could not wait the needful five minutes for a sole.

All his kind considerations and calculations however, were frustrated. Had his master been a newly converted Jew, the flavour of the former abomination could not have appeared more exquisite. He ate and wondered how he could ever have entertained a prejudice against one of

the choicest dishes that could be placed upon table, ordered a bottle of madeira, and resolved “to make himself comfortable” after his unusual fast of four-and-twenty hours.

Having finished his dinner, he, according to the custom of lonely English gentlemen, betook himself to the perusal of the evening papers, and his eye very soon fell upon a paragraph which riveted his attention. It ran as follows:

“A melancholy occurrence took place yesterday evening, near the Elephant and Castle, in consequence of a fight between two of the boys who, during the fogs at this season of the year, are commonly in attendance with torches to light passengers across the road. After several rounds, one of the combatants fell and was unable to rise again. He was promptly conveyed, by some humane persons passing, to a neighbouring surgeon’s, and from thence, we are sorry to say, with little hopes of recovery, to St. Thomas’s Hospital. He seems to have been but a weakly lad, and is the son of a poor

widow. This, in itself, is sufficiently deplorable ; but our readers will learn with indignation that the fight was got up, for the purpose of attracting a crowd, by a gang of desperate ruffians. Several gentlemen had their pockets picked, and a lady was so dreadfully alarmed that serious consequences are apprehended. The impudent audacity of the fellow who caused all this mischief is almost unparalleled, as it now appears that he had made his escape from custody scarcely an hour before, having been caught in a man-trap in the garden of a gentleman at Clapham, where the snare had been purposely placed for him, as he had been observed lurking about and asking questions respecting the family during the afternoon. By some slight-of-hand trick he contrived to extricate himself from the constables, and from the brief time that elapsed before his appearance at the Elephant and Castle, it is supposed that some of his companions were in waiting for him, with one of those light carts so frequently used

by fellows of this description. The ruffian's mode of exciting attention among the poor boys was ingenious. Disengaging himself from his companions, and being respectably dressed, he mixed with the various stage-passengers, and in a tone of authority, inquired for a hackney-coach. The lads of course crowded round, and offered their services to the 'gentleman,' who attributed the soils upon his clothes, gained in recent capture and escape, to a fall which he unluckily had met with. Many respectable persons present expressed their commiseration, and the villain was escorted by half-a-dozen link-boys to the stand of coaches, where he kept them while haggling with three or four different coachmen about an extra shilling, which they demanded in consequence of the soiled state of his dress. In the mean while his companions came up, and whispered that 'the poor gentleman's arm was broken,' and that 'one of the Brighton coaches had been overturned;' and thus excited general curiosity to

the spot ; and then the scoundrel, having ensconced himself in a hackney-coach, which drove off unperceived during the succeeding uproar, offered the two poor boys in question a crown to ‘fight it out.’ The temptation was too strong for the unfortunate victim, whose mother, we understand, is in a state of deplorable penury. We still hope, however, that the wretch will not be long out of the hands of justice, as the gentleman in whose garden he was found has offered a handsome reward for his apprehension.”

Bernard probably would not have relished his pork quite so much, had he read this paragraph before dinner. As it was, we are sorry to say there was more of anger than of repentance, or even of pity for the poor sufferer, in his feelings. An overcharged accusation makes even a conscious criminal feel himself comparatively innocent ; but, as the thrower of the half-crown, which in the present instance had wrought such a fatal result, had no evil

intent, he felt himself fully exonerated from the consequences.

“ I will, however,” thought he, “ make some inquiry about the lad to-morrow, and send the poor woman a trifle. In the mean while let me think of the probable inconveniences, if that old fool, neighbour Syms, should induce Mr. Read to offer a reward for my apprehension. Ah ! I perceive. The hackney-coachman who drove me here will be the first; and then—another Bow-street adventure. It won’t do to part with my gift yet; that’s plain enough. I must first get fairly out of the scrapes it has brought me into. I’ll change my hotel, at all events, to-morrow morning.”

Having settled this point, he summoned Andrews, and ordered him to have every thing in readiness.

“ You may as well,” he continued, “ give the people of the house to understand that I am going on a visit a short distance from town. Indeed, I have an invitation of that sort, though

I rather think I shall merely remove to some more agreeable situation farther westward. This is a dull corner, very well for my uncle, but positively insupportable to me, and quite out of the way of all my friends."

The valet bowed submission, and retired to perform his functions, muttering,

" His friends ! Who can they be, I wonder ? We shall see now whether I guessed right or not. He's got some bad connexions somewhere, however ; I am sure of that."

CHAPTER XXI.

AT noon, on the following day, our hero found himself snugly established at Long's, and, in less than half an hour, received a visit from Lord Norcourt, a young nobleman who had been one of his principal associates at Christ Church, and was now lodged under the same roof.

“Where have you been hiding yourself, Audrey?” inquired his Lordship; “we have seen nothing of you since our rattling dinner at the Thatched-House. I've asked half a dozen of our set for your address, but nobody knew it. What have you been doing?”

“Playing at hide and seek, my Lord,” replied Bernard. “The simple fact is, that my

poor uncle has been extremely unwell. The physicians have now ordered him out of town. You know how much like a father he has always been to me."

" So be it even to the end !" exclaimed his Lordship. " But ordered out of town by the physicians ! To Bath or Cheltenham, I suppose. The sentence, eh ? I hope there is no breach between you at such a critical moment ? How was it that you did not accompany him ? I am very glad to see you here ; but, really, upon my honour, I question if you have acted judiciously in allowing him to go alone."

" It was his own wish," said Bernard, drily, " and he knows that I have business in hand which requires my presence a little longer in town."

" Ah !—true, true," observed his Lordship, " what could I be thinking of ? I've heard all about that from my cousins, the Dashfords, who have a place very near your's in Northamptonshire ; and, between ourselves, I don't think

they are quite pleased by your neglect of them. But your Alicia is certainly a very fine girl. I was quite struck with her last night, before I knew who she was."

"Where? whom are you speaking of?" exclaimed Bernard.

"Nay, my dear fellow," said the young nobleman, "don't look so strange about the matter, nor attempt to mystify me; for I tell you I know *all* about it, from the first dance on your birth-day to the general move off to town."

"But last night, you say?" resumed Bernard, "you saw her last night?"

"Ay, verily, did I," replied his Lordship, "and my good opera-glass bore witness to the exceeding judgment of my friend. My cousin Dashforts are fine showy girls; but, certes, no more to be compared to her 'than I to Hercules;' to say nothing of another hundred thousand charms, which fame says she will possess ere long."

“ But, tell me, Norcourt, where was this ?” inquired Bernard, anxiously.

“ It was even at the Opera,” replied his Lordship, “ and I looked for you; but, in your place, beheld a young naval officer, just the sort of fellow with whom I should not feel particularly anxious for my mistress, if I had one, to be very intimate.”

“ My dear friend,” said our hero, “ I will be candid with you. Every thing *was* settled for our marriage; but, the father has suddenly taken umbrage; and, being a strange, whimsical, hasty character, has contrived to send his daughter upon a visit to I know not whom; and for the last two days I have been vainly endeavouring to find her. If I can but discover where she is, let them keep me out of the house if they can. Did you know any of her party ?”

“ No—certainly not,” replied Lord Norcourt; “ but—take me with you. I am of your plot, Audrey. The old plum-cultivating merchant

has used you scurvily ; and I am of opinion that all young fellows should stick together, ' shoulder to shoulder,' against all cross-grained fathers. So—*allons !* Let us go first to the Haymarket. I can point out the box she sat in, and we will soon find whom it belongs to."

On their arrival at the office, they discovered that the box in question appertained to Sir Marmaduke Bonus, the candidate for the vacant East India Directorship, and the particular friend of Sir William and Mr. Storer. It now appeared perfectly clear to Bernard that Alicia must be on a visit in Harley-street, and he resolved to make an invisible entry into the nabob's mansion ; but, of course, did not think proper to let his companion into that part of his plan.

" Do you know any thing of this Sir Marmaduke ?" inquired Lord Norcourt.

" Nothing more than that he is reputed to be very rich, and is canvassing for a seat in the direction ; and, moreover, has a seat at his

disposal in another House, which was intended for me, but my senatorial promotion is postponed till I shall be older and wiser grown."

"Will you venture to call at the house boldly, or make use of stratagem?" asked his Lordship.

"Both," replied our hero, gaily; "and, if Alicia be there, I defy them to prevent me from seeing her."

"Bravo!" exclaimed the young nobleman; "shall I go with you? Tell me only what to do, and I will obey. There was a fine dark-eyed girl with her last night, whom, methinks, I could delight to keep in chat, as a sort of by-play, while you enact the principal business of the scene."

Bernard declined this friendly offer, saying that it was his intention to make use of the name of that young lady's brother, in order to gain admittance, as he anticipated that his own would be already put upon the black list by Mr. Storer's caution.

The two friends then agreed to meet at dinner, and parted at the end of Harley-street, along which our hero boldly marched, and having digested his plan, so as he doubted not to avoid all the petty vexations of former exploits, gave a thundering knock at the Nabob's door, and inquired for Miss Read. The footman asked for a card.

“ How provoking !” exclaimed Bernard, fumbling in his pockets. “ I have left my case at home. But you will have no difficulty. Tell her it is her brother.”

The man stared ; but immediately ushered him into a room, and went up-stairs to deliver his message, while Bernard, availing himself of solitude, went through the usual ceremony, and disappeared.

In a few minutes, a lady, whose age could be little less than forty, entered the room, and appeared surprised to find it vacant.

“ My brother !” she murmured : “ What can have brought him to town so suddenly ?

And she rang the bell, which was immediately answered by the footman who had announced Bernard in his new character.

“Charles,” said the lady, “I understood you that my brother was in this room. Where have you shown him?”

“He was here not a minute ago, Ma’am,” replied the man, looking round with amazement.

“It is very strange!” exclaimed the lady.
“What sort of person was he?”

“A young gentleman, Ma’am,” said Charles.
“He was quite fashionably dressed, and——”

“How could you be such a simpleton?” cried Miss Read authoritatively, and thus betraying to our invisible hero her real character, which was that of superintendant of the old widowed nabob’s household. “My brother is at least fifty years of age, and anything but fashionable. Don’t gape about you, but raise the alarm! You have admitted one of those impostors into the house, of whose tricks we

read every day. Look round and see if you miss any thing."

While the bewildered footman was, in obedience to this order, running about the room, in a manner which rendered it extremely difficult for Bernard to get out of his way, a carriage stopped at the door.

"I do not miss anything, Ma'am," said he.

"So much the better," replied the lady; "but the fellow must have had some motive for practising the imposture. However, there is your master at the door, and I should not wish him to be made uneasy, as he has quite enough upon his mind already. So, keep your own counsel, and go to the door now; and then do you and the rest search the house properly."

The man obeyed her orders, and in a minute afterwards Sir Marmaduke himself entered the room, and asked Miss Read if she would be kind enough to give him some papers, which he had left with her in the earlier part of the morning. As soon as she had retired for that

purpose, he sat down and employed himself in making notes relative to the progress of his canvass.

“Humph!” he soliloquized. “This illness of poor Sir William Audrey’s is most unfortunate! As for the young fellow, and the giving up the seat, and the breaking off the match with Storer’s daughter—all that’s lucky enough. I’m pretty sure of the old merchant, I think; but we must bring all our men into play in order to win the game.”

Here the lady of the house returned with the papers, which she placed on the table.

“My dear Miss Read,” said the Nabob, “we will, if you please, dine at seven. I expect about half-a-dozen. You don’t happen to know if Henry is in the house? If he is, will you be so obliging as to say that I wish to speak with him. That is a good lady. Really I don’t know what I should do without you.”

Miss Read made a brief reply, laughed, and tripped away, apparently highly pleased with

the compliment ; and Sir Marmaduke continued his soliloquy.

“ One must hold a candle sometimes to a certain person, they say ; but really latterly it has been too bad. I do think the gipsy begins to conceive that she has a right to be mistress here. However, when this election bustle is at an end, I must clip her wings a little. ‘ Set a beggar on horseback,’ they say. Positively, the last month’s bills were abominable. I don’t believe she ever asks the price of any thing now, but lets the tradespeople charge just whatever they like, as if money was a thing to be picked up in the street.”

Here he was interrupted by the entrance of a remarkably fine young man, whom he accosted as his nephew, and desired to be seated.

“ I wished to have a little quiet conversation with you, Henry,” he continued ; “ and as my way is to come to the point at once, which I know you sailors like best, tell me, like an honest fellow as you are, what you think of the

two young ladies with whom you were at the Opera last night, and which is your favourite?"

"That's a poser, uncle," replied the young man laughing. "Hardly fair either; since praising one would seem like disparaging the other. As our admirals say, when writing home, 'to mention names would be invi-
dious.'"

"No equivocation, Henry," said Sir Mar-
maduke. "I do remember that I once was young, and, if I have not quite forgotten the feelings of those times, it was not exactly usual to admire—that is, to be much stricken with women in the lump, or, even by the brace. No, no, Harry, there's always one for choice, my lad. It is in the essence of human nature. So, which say you—Miss Storer. or Miss Read?"

"Well, then, uncle," replied the young officer, "if I were to exchange broadsides, all in the regular way, I don't think I should

choose 'the Charlotte,' as they call her; for, to tell you the truth, she carries too many guns. But, pshaw! what signifies what a poor lieutenant thinks? Heigho! when I get posted indeed, I may have a better chance; and, in the mean while, I must be content to dream, as I did all last night."

"Do you know any thing of Miss Storer's fortune or expectations?" asked Sir Marmaduke.

"Not I," was the reply; "all I know is, that her connexions belong to the set concerned in your election, which I hope is going on to your satisfaction?"

"Thank you, Henry, perfectly so," said the uncle. "Mr. Storer is a gentleman of great influence in the city, and has rendered me very considerable service. The young lady we are speaking of is his only child, and her fortune will be *very* handsome. I dare not venture to say how much. I suppose you will not think the worse of her on that account?"

“A rich cargo never spoilt the beauty of a ship yet,” replied the lieutenant. “But it is of no use for *me* to think about her.”

“Listen to what I have to say, Henry,” resumed Sir Marmaduke, seriously. “You know my plan in general has been to repress your hopes of advancement when I thought them too sanguine. As a younger brother, you have been bred to a profession, the character of which, and your own conduct in it, entitle you to attention in *any* society. I now tell you plainly and confidentially, that, if you go on as you have done, the interest which I have shall be exerted to the utmost; and, with that, you may be sure of promotion. The people with whom we associate know this as well as I do; and, therefore, though you call yourself only a poor lieutenant, they look upon you in a very different light from that in which they view subalterns in general. But, to set your mind more at ease relative to the Storers, I shall take the earliest opportunity of drop-

ping a few words to the father, which cannot fail to produce a favourable effect. Indeed, I expect him here every minute, as he is extremely punctual. With regard to the young lady, I have nothing more to say. You have seen her, and will have opportunities of cultivating her acquaintance, if you think fit. I know that strong recommendations from friends on such matters seldom answer any good purpose, and so leave the whole to your own choice. I can have no other wish on the subject than to see you happy whether married or single, and have too good an opinion of you to believe you would marry merely for money.

The young lieutenant thanked his uncle, with an eloquence and warmth of grateful feeling which, for a moment, produced a favourable impression even upon his invisible rival. Sir Marmaduke shook his nephew warmly by the hand, and appeared to be about to say something, when a carriage stopped at the

door, and the knocker and bell announced an arrival. "That must be Storer," said the nabob, looking at his watch; and scarcely were the words out of his mouth ere the merchant entered the room, exclaiming.

"Morning, Sir Marmaduke. Morning, Captain. Thank you for beauing Ally and her friend last night—very much pleased with the Op'ra—can't tell why, though—went once—quite enough—out of my line—don't like your Squallinis.—There are some proxies for you, Sir Marmaduke—count 'em—should be nineteen—and here, my boy—there's a brace of stars! What d'ye say to that?—How've *you* gone on this morning?"

Sir Marmaduke began to relate some particulars of his progress, which, not being very interesting to the young lieutenant, he chose to consider as a hint for him to leave the room. As he was in the act of opening the door, Mr. Storer exclaimed :

"Girls in the carriage if it isn't gone—want

to buy some flowers—be back for me in half an hour—see 'm—thank you themselves—Old woman and all there."

Bernard heard the carriage drive off at the moment, and reflected that as Alicia was with her mother, and that, consequently, it would be impossible for him to speak to her, his time might be better employed till their return in listening to what Sir Marmaduke would say respecting his nephew.

The young sailor, however, disappeared instantly, and the quick banging of the street-door announced that he was in chase.

"All alive, the Captain," said Mr. Storer. "Fine fellow too—like sailors—always did—no humbug about them. Wooden walls, eh? Nothing like 'em."

"Between ourselves, Mr. Storer," said Sir Marmaduke, with a confidential air, "*that* young man is now the *hope*, and will, some day, I trust, be the *pride* of our family."

"Eh? how's that?" exclaimed the merchant,

“ second brother, isn’t he ? Eldest offended you, eh ?”

“ No,” replied the nabob ; “ my namesake will make a very good, quiet, easy-going country gentleman : but Henry, my dear Sir, is—— Pshaw ! nonsense ! You will think me quite foolish if I tell you all I feel towards him ; so I will merely say that, were he my only child, I would not wish him to be any thing but what he is.”

“ Glad of it—very glad,” observed Mr. Storer ; “ hope he’ll get on—half-pay no great go, though—get him afloat soon, suppose ?”

“ I am in no great hurry about that, my dear Sir,” said Sir Marmaduke, smiling ; “ and I’ll tell *you* why, though I should not wish it to go any farther *at present*. I mean to put him in nomination for Trevotain, at the expected vacancy.”

“ Got a head, Sir Marmaduke ?” exclaimed Mr. Storer. “ Ay, ay, that’s the way. Get him posted, sure as our books.”

“ And what is more,” continued the nabob, “ he will not be a *silent* member.”

“ Eh ! what ?” cried the merchant, to whom an acquaintance with a speaking M. P. was always a desideratum, “ are you sure of that ? Tough job to speak in the House—posed many a chatterer out of it.—Counsellor Crossquery looked mighty small, remember.”

“ Oh, yes,” said Sir Marmaduke, “ I shall not easily forget that night. I enjoyed it much, for the fellow was so abominably self-conceited, and looked round with such a ludicrous air of self-complacency, as much as to say, ‘ I am about to condescend to astonish you.’ Poor fellow ! he had better have kept inside of his wig. But Henry’s talent is quite of a different order. His is natural eloquence, as you shall have an opportunity of witnessing in the course of a week or so, when I can contrive to make a *select* party. At present, this election prevents any thing of that sort ; and your maxim and mine has ever been to stick to the business in

hand, though I seem almost to have forgotten it in chattering about this boy, whose affairs cannot possibly interest you. I really ask your pardon."

"Not a bit," exclaimed the merchant; "nothing more to say—done what I could this morning—try again to-morrow—not forgot that Indigo business, Sir Marmaduke—one good turn deserves another—not forgot the offer of the seat in the house to Sir William Audrey neither—same thing as to me then. Bad business that—young fellow's sold himself to old Nick, far as I can make out—be the death of his uncle—obliged to be off—couldn't stand it—shall let him know, though, what sacrifice you made."

The rest of their conversation related principally to electioneering matters, though the young lieutenant and his prospects were once or twice referred to by Mr. Storer. On those occasions, however, Sir Marmaduke treated the subject as though he felt that it was introduced merely out of politeness, for the purpose of gra-

tifying him, while it could not possibly be of any moment to his friend.

“ There’s my carriage !” cried Mr. Storer, hearing the sound of wheels, and looking at his watch ; “ wife punctual—knows my ways—can’t trust young ladies—old heads don’t fit young shoulders—What’s that fool of mine knocking that way for ? Mean to break the door down ?—Jackass ! Told him fifty times.”

Here the Lieutenant burst into the room, evidently in high spirits, and said that the ladies were at the door.

“ Been with ’em, suppose ?” inquired Mr. Storer.

“ Yes, Sir,” replied Henry ; “ I hailed the carriage, and got aboard, just as it was tacking round the corner, and we’ve had a charming stroll in the nursery-grounds. A perfect paradise ! But I cannot persuade the ladies to come in, uncle. If we’d a boat alongside, with such a cargo, we’d soon have them aboard ; but I’m not commander here.”

“ Well, Henry,” said Sir Marmaduke, smiling, “ I take your hint, and, with Mr. Storer’s permission, will do all I can to prevail upon them.”

“ Do as they like,” said the merchant—“ only let me have the carriage. Have ‘em at all, must keep ‘em for an hour—can’t be back sooner—hour and quarter, perhaps.”

In less than five minutes Mrs. Storer, Alicia, and Charlotte, were sitting in Sir Marmaduke’s magnificent front drawing-room, in cheerful and familiar chat with its owner and the delighted seaman; while poor Bernard stood, invisible, in a corner, watching their motions and looks, and listening to all that passed, with feelings “ which may be more easily conceived than described.”

Presently Miss Read, senior, made her appearance, and attached herself to her namesake, as our hero thought, in consequence of an understood sign from Sir Marmaduke; while the old gentleman himself paid particular attention to Mrs. Storer, and thus left Alicia to the Lieu-

tenant, who chatted away with an ease and fluency which were supereminently provoking to the unseen auditor.

In order that the young lady's character may not suffer wrongfully, it may be as well here to state, that she had been in very low spirits since the discovery of Bernard's mystery, and with great difficulty had been prevailed upon to go to the Opera. Naturally fond of music, and not an unapt scholar in the science, which she had studied under the first masters of the day, she was able duly to appreciate the vocal and instrumental talent displayed by the performers, and in consequence derived what is commonly called “a very great treat.”

Perhaps she might not have been altogether insensible of having attracted some notice; but such a circumstance seldom tends to destroy a young lady's happiness for the time being. Of the Lieutenant, at first, she thought only that he was a good-tempered, cheerful young man, and felt obliged by his attentions to herself and

friend. As the evening advanced, she was occasionally amused by a certain familiar bluntness in his address, which was, however, perfectly respectful ; and as far removed from ill manners, as from the affected foppery to which she had sometimes been exposed. Her mother and Charlotte, too, seemed perfectly “at home” with him, while he seemed equally so with them ; and thus, in an hour or two, they were all upon a familiar footing, which it would have taken strait-laced people many weeks to establish. The short ride and walk just terminated, likewise gave him an opportunity of showing her that, with all his bluntness, he was very far from being a booby ; though she certainly did not perceive those very extraordinary abilities for which Sir Marmaduke appeared to give him credit. Of his person a hint has been given before ; and ladies are not apt to be prejudiced against a new acquaintance, in consequence of his being, from no fault of his own, a fine, handsome young fellow.

So Alicia and the Lieutenant chatted away concerning the scenes of the preceding evening and the meeting of the morning; and though what they said was not all nonsense, neither was it of sufficient import to be here related. Bernard, however, thought it worth listening to; and, like all other jealous people, ingeniously contrived to extract as much torment as possible from trifles. Sir Marmaduke, too, under pretence of showing Mrs. Storer a curious East India cabinet, had inveigled her into the back drawing-room, where the suspicious invisible gentleman opined that her ear would be assailed with the same sort of laudatory encomiums on his rival, as he had heard below-stairs, and was soon convinced that his apprehensions were not groundless.

“It is the most beautiful piece of workmanship I ever saw,” said Mrs. Storer, after examining the cabinet closely.

“I prize it highly,” observed Sir Marmaduke; “not so much on account of its real

value — but, because of the manner in which I became possessed of it. I hardly know whether I dare venture to tell you now—some other time, perhaps. You will enter into my feelings, I know."

"No," said the lady, taking a seat, "I am a genuine daughter of Eve; and, as you have roused my curiosity, I stir not from hence till you have gratified it."

"My dear Madam," replied Sir Marmaduke, "nothing can afford me greater pleasure, only I should not like to be overheard by *all* in the next room."

"Well, well, I am not deaf," observed the lady, making a sign for the nabob to sit beside her.

The hint was obeyed; and, in a low tone, Sir Marmaduke poured into her listening ear a tale, which Bernard felt convinced was egregiously overwrought, concerning his nephew's bravery and skill, when employed in cutting out a vessel from under a French battery.

“ The cargo was extremely valuable,” continued the uncle, “ and Henry was sent home as prize-master. I went to Portsmouth on purpose to see him and the ship, and resolved to have something out of her as a memorial of an action which will ever reflect honour on all who bear our name. I gave orders that the cabinet should be bought for me at *any* price ; and I always look upon it with pride and pleasure. I shall never part with it till my nephew marries, and then I mean to give it to his wife, and hope it will descend from generation to generation ; for such deeds of noble daring—excuse my weakness, Madam—really, I know not how to restrain myself, when speaking of my young hero, my dear boy.”—(here the old gentleman seemed much affected)—“ Such deeds, my dear Madam, are not things merely of the day. They elevate even the character of the nation to which the individual belongs, and will live in memory, and be the boast, and pride, and incentive to action for a future race, when we are

dead and forgotten. I am sure you can enter into my feelings."

" I can indeed," said Mrs. Storer. " Oh, Sir Marmaduke ! You little guess how much ! Shall I say I envy you ? Alas ! if my poor dear William had lived, he would now have been about the same age, and just such another ! But—God's will be done ! Perhaps it is all for the best ;" and she raised a handkerchief to her eyes.

Sir Marmaduke began to express his regret at having introduced a subject which recalled painful remembrances to his visiter ; but, Bernard had heard enough, and left the room, muttering to himself, " The crafty old fox ! but I 'll be a match for him ;" and angry and excited as he was, he felt, at the moment, that it was an excellent thing to be invisible.

CHAPTER XXII.

BRIEF, as usual, was our hero's exultation in the possession of his gift.

After listening to what had passed between Sir Marmaduke and Mrs. Storer, he returned to the front drawing-room, to watch Alicia and his rival, who were engaged in looking over a magnificent folio "Flora," in which the latter pointed out several rare plants which they had just seen in the hot-houses.

Nothing could be more innocent than such an employment; but Bernard felt that they were provokingly near to each other, and longed to snatch the Lieutenant's seat from under him.

“ How exquisitely beautiful and correct is that Magnolia !” said Alicia. “ Indeed they are all perfect. I could sit and look over the book all day.”

“ That you can please yourself about,” observed the sailor, “ for I shall put it into your carriage. I ’ll engage for my uncle’s consent.”

Miss Storer protested against any request of the sort being made; but Sir Marmaduke entered the room at the moment, and decided the matter, by stating that he should feel himself quite hurt if his old friend Storer’s daughter would not condescend to borrow a book of him. “ My dear young lady,” he continued, “ I am ashamed to say that I have scarcely looked into it since it first came into my possession. Indeed, I do not profess to understand such things. I bought it at poor Leaf-drier’s sale, Henry, just after you sent me that lot of seeds and plants, of your own collecting in the Mediterranean.”

“ Then you are a florist ? a botanist ?” said

Alicia to the Lieutenant, who disclaimed any knowledge of the science ; and stated that he had merely accompanied the surgeon of his ship, who was a great collector, in some of his excursions.

“ Well, Henry,” observed Sir Marmaduke, smiling, “ I won’t dispute about words. Call it science, or art, or what you will, but, if it had not been for some sort of knowledge which you contrived to pick up, I am sure I don’t know what would have become of my exotics at Richmond. The gardener was making sad work of it before your return.”

“ Humph !” thought the invisible gentleman ; “ orator, hero, florist, botanist ! I wonder what they’ll make of him next ? This is indeed precious ‘ humbug,’ as Mr. Storer would say !”

At that moment the worthy merchant came bustling into the room, exclaiming, “ Hope you haven’t let the women keep you, Sir Marmaduke !—Hate ceremony—your time precious—

know that very well—just now in particular. Come—ready, dear?—ready, girls?"

" You are always in haste, my dear Sir," said Sir Marmaduke.

" No—never," replied Mr. Storer, " never get through business if I was. All arranged beforehand. Cool and steady. Then—push on—keep moving—till all 's done. That 's my way."

" You understand the value of time," observed the nabob.

" No great secret that," replied the merchant,—" take him by the forelock, that 's all—slips away else.—Remember what Nelson used to say, Captain?—Young chap told him he 'd be sure to be punctual to the minute.—‘ Quarter of an hour before,’ said the glorious fellow, ‘ that 's my way—owe all to that quarter.’—Good lesson that, Sir Marmaduke—wish could get the women to attend to it a little oftener."

" Well, my dear," said Mrs. Storer, " we are quite ready *now*."

“Never mind—no consequence now,” observed Mr. Storer, “no more engagements to-day. Only dare say Sir Marm’duke has.”

“Only one—and that is an hour hence,” said the nabob; “so pray take a seat and a glass of madeira. It is not the newest you ever tasted, I will venture to say.”

“Don’t often take any thing before dinner,” muttered Mr. Storer; “strong temptation, though:—Oily—eh?—Right sort, Sir Marm’duke—good as my own—When’ll you come and taste that?—Glad to see you and Captain too—take us in the family way.”

“We will do ourselves the pleasure before long, rely upon it,” replied Sir Marmaduke, and the Lieutenant bowed his acknowledgments.

“Glad to see you any day,” said the merchant; “but ‘any day’s no day,’ they say—so suppose fix at once—To-morrow I’m engaged with Sir Close Hawker—somebody sent him a haunch—never *buys* any thing but necks of mutton—old wine though, left by his father—

wonder he doesn't sell that—sleeping partner in two or three concerns—hopes to get an East India order from our house for one—shan't have it unless he votes for you, though.—Well—day after to-morrow—what say you, eh?—Take us as you find us—all in the family way—no fuss?"

"Agreed, for my part," replied Sir Marmaduke.

"I shall be most happy to avail myself of your polite invitation," said the Lieutenant.

"Pish! pshaw!" said the merchant; "never was celebrated for politeness—another word for humbug.—Glad to see you, that's all. What big book have you got there, Ally?—Looks like a ledger—not quite so thick, though."

Sir Marmaduke took this opportunity of repeating what had just passed.

"Well, very good of you," observed the merchant—"mind take care of it, Ally—no dog's ears. So you understand those things, Captain?—Wish you'd been with us at Max-

dean in the summer—confounded bother with the hot-houses."

" You must contrive to spend a day with me at Richmond," said Sir Marmaduke, " and bring the ladies with you. You will then see how Henry has managed with the flues. I left it all to him."

" Eh ! what ?" exclaimed Mr. Storer :— " that's just what I want to understand. But how should a sailor know any thing about such matters ?"

" How, indeed !" thought the invisible gentleman. " I suppose now they will make an architect of him !"

" It certainly is no part of my regular profession," observed the Lieutenant ; " but it happened that the ship I belonged to was in dock, at Deptford, when some vessels were fitting up for a polar expedition, and so I had an opportunity of observing their plans for distributing the heat, pretty equally, through all parts of the vessel."

“ Ay, ay,” said the merchant. “ Keep your eyes open — always learn something. That’s the only way. Ship isn’t a hot-house, though. Jack tars not much like delicate plants neither. Bad job if they were, eh ?”

“ No, Sir,” replied the Lieutenant laughing. “ But as the work was in progress, it appeared desirable to collect as much information as possible that might chance to bear on the subject ; and so I made one of a party of brother-officers, and visited all the hot-houses and green-houses about London that we could hear of or get admittance to.”

“ Capital !” exclaimed the merchant. “ Wish I’d known you before. Not too late now, though. Must have you down to Max-dean.”

It appeared to Bernard as if all parties had conspired regularly to enlist the Lieutenant, in order to fill the vacancy caused by his own dismissal ; and his vexation and anger were by no means lessened at the style of leave-taking

which followed. There was a vast deal too much of hand-shaking, and he could not help suspecting that that of Alicia had been subjected to a very improper degree of pressure, as the young sailor handed her into the carriage.

At that moment, however, he was obliged to be upon the alert, to secure for his own invisible person the means of following the young lady, as he resolved not to lose sight of her till he had obtained an interview.

As Mr. Storer's coachman and footman rode together upon the box, there was "standing room" for one behind ; so he clambered up as adroitly as possible, and caught the straps, which serve footmen to hold by, just in time to save himself from falling backwards, as the horses obeyed the well-known signal and sprang forward.

" Let them take her where they will now," muttered Bernard, " she shall not escape me this time."

Scarcely had he thus congratulated himself, when Peter the coachman gave a singular and most unpleasant specimen of his skill and talents for observation. This worthy practitioner of the graceful art of “cutting a fly’s eye out” with the lash of his whip, was so perfectly accustomed to the movements of his aërial throne, which swung upon the same springs as the body of the carriage, that he felt the backward jerk at starting, and knew thereby that he had an extra passenger.

“Don’t look behind,” said he to the footman. “Let the gemman settle himself a bit, and then you’ll see how I’ll sarve him out.”

In pursuance of this philanthropic scheme he drove steadily forward, till the crossing of another vehicle compelled him to pull up suddenly, a movement by which the unpractised invisible footman was jerked violently against the back of the carriage.

“This will never do,” thought Bernard; “I must contrive to seat myself in some man-

ner," and he was in the act of crouching down, holding by the springs, and thrusting his legs beneath the wooden bar or standard, commonly put on in London to prevent carriages from being injured in a throng, when Peter commenced hostilities. Had our hero laid himself out for a flogging, his position could not have been better adapted to receive the full allowance. Arms, legs, hands, back and face all came in for their share. "Crack, crack, crack," went the whip, and not a crack fell harmless; while the horses, as if alarmed at the noise, doubled their speed, and rendered escape a doubly perilous affair.

"I don't see any one behind, Peter," said the footman, stooping down and looking round.

"Perhaps you mayn't," observed the coachman; "but didn't ye feel that bump just now, as I pulled up. I feels im, howsomever with my vip, as plain as if I see'd im. There! that tickled the warment, or I 'm blest; but

he's a staunch un as he an't given tongue yet," and he continued to lay on more furiously than ever.

Some mischievous boys seeing him flog the back of his carriage without any visible motive, were highly pleased with the joke, and excited him still more by bawling,

"Cut behind ! Cut, cut behind ! Give it him well ! He's quite a gemman, and ought to be ashamed of himself."

Mr. Storer peeped through the back-light, and highly enjoying the apparent obstinacy of his self-conceited coachman, forbore to interfere. So Peter, firm in his own opinion, and encouraged by the silence within and the noise without, continued his operations till our hero had received such a horsewhipping as very few gentlemen have had the mishap to undergo.

After wincing, and turning, and twisting in all directions, he at length contrived to skreen himself from the lash, by crouching beneath the sword case, and sitting astride, with his legs dangling on either side of the perch.

By this time they were in the outskirts of town, and the roads being nearly liquid with the exuberance of luxurious metropolitan mud, he discovered, by certain unpleasant sensations, that an encrustation of it was rapidly accumulating about his nether members, from the constant action of the horses' feet. Maddened as he nearly was by vexation and pain, he determined not to lose sight of Alicia, and stuck to his uneasy post, while the carriage kept rolling on, till they were completely out of town, and the twinkling of lamps here and there, proclaimed that the brief winter's daylight was drawing to a close.

As Peter had long since felt satisfied that the “warmint” had “hopsconded,” his whip was employed in its usual and more peaceable avocations ; so the unfortunate invisible gentleman extricated himself from his awkward and somewhat perilous position, and, turning round, seated himself on the board appropriated for footmen to stand upon ; and there, humble as such a mode of travelling was, felt

comparatively at ease, and congratulated himself upon his perseverance. “It would have been impossible,” thought he, “for me to have discovered in any other way where they are going to take her;” and so, drawing comfort under his inflictions, from the prospect of speedy success, he sate, with his head held down, under an instinctive dread of the whip.

At length the lamps shed the only light that penetrated the foggy atmosphere. He had previously cast an occasional glance round, to enable him to guess in what direction he was moving, but had long since been out of “his latitude;” and now, convinced that all farther observation would be useless, he sank into a reverie, from which he was suddenly aroused by the fall of some heavy, soft substance, into his lap.

Looking up, he was startled to perceive another candidate for his apparently vacant seat in the person of a chimney-sweeper, who had thrown his bag up first, that it might not

encumber him in his ascent, which he was about to make, when the said bag was thrown back upon him with a degree of violence which astonished the poor fellow exceedingly. Though he saw no one, he knew by experience that soot in the lump would not move without hands; so, like men disappointed of higher places, he raised a cry against the present possessor, shouting,

“Cut, cut behind!”

The active Peter “felt” with his whip, and finding the alarm correct, our hero was once more driven into his dirty, uneasy quarters, by another horsewhipping, with the additional mortification of knowing from certain grimy feelings about the face and hands, that the upper part of his dress was now as much out of “presentable” condition as the lower.

The cracking of the whip ceased, the horses jogged on, and the fog thickened for another weary half-hour, and then the carriage stopped at a small iron-gate at the end of some twenty

or thirty iron-railings, forming the front of the front-garden of a small house, which, though scarcely a dozen yards from the road, was barely visible, till the small door of it was opened, and a maid-servant standing with a light, gave evidence that an arrival was expected.

Bernard extricated himself as well as he could; but from the cold, and the uneasy position in which he had been sitting, was somewhat cramped, and excessively awkward. The consequence was that he got to the aforesaid gate just in time to see Alicia and Charlotte run up the steps and enter the house, where they and the maid so completely filled the passage that it was impossible for him to pass.

“ Well,” thought he, “ I shall have time to rub a little of this mud off my feet by the time the old people are out, and then I must contrive to push by somehow,” and he availed himself of some box-edging to the flower-borders.

Scarcely had he drawn one foot across, ere he was startled by hearing the carriage-door shut, and, as if by signal, that of the house was banged to at the same instant, and the next a grinding of wheels was heard, and Mr. and Mrs. Storer were on their way back to town.

Vexed as he was at not having gained admittance at the same time with Alicia, our hero thought that by no means a desperate affair. He had now traced her to her hiding-place, and with the means in his power, it would be impossible for her to avoid an interview.

Lights were soon visible in the upper windows of the small house, indicating that the ladies were at their toilet ; and presently a lad came lounging through the gate, carrying a tray of pewter-pots, and most unmusically bellowing “Be-e-e-er !” These were evident tokens of dinner ; and wet, muddy, begrimed, smarting, cold and hungry as Bernard was, he could not avoid contrasting his present situation

with the snug, comfortable manner in which but a few days before he used to take his seat at table by the side of Alicia, “all in the family way,” in Russell Square.

But it was now time for action rather than reflection, and he flattered himself that he might gain admission by keeping close to the pot-boy. That hope, however, was soon at an end, as the maid-servant, who had previously opened the door, made her appearance now in a small area below, beneath an iron grating, through which the itinerant young publican handed the foaming “entire,” and received some empty vessels in exchange, and then went whistling away.

“Now or never!” said Bernard. “I must contrive to get in before they sit down to dinner, or they will be alarmed when I open the parlour-door; and, moreover, I may learn something of Alicia’s real state of mind from their conversation. I think now my feet must be tolerably clean, at least not dirty enough to leave visible stains upon a carpet.”

Having come to this resolution, he first sought for a bell at the gate, remembering how completely that at Clapham had answered his purpose. But as none was to be found, he boldly advanced, and gave that sort of authoritative knock at the door, which he judged would prevent it from being answered through the grating below. As he heard the process of unlocking, he made up his mind to enter at once, even if he were obliged to push the girl aside for that purpose ; yet still he had little doubt of being able to manage the thing more adroitly, and that she would attribute the knock to “a runaway.” Great therefore was his disappointment when the door opened about a foot, and then remained stationary, in consequence of being secured by a strong chain, while a shrill voice from within inquired, “Who’s there ?”

Unprepared for this interrogatory, Bernard replied,

“I wish to speak to your master on particular business.”

“ You have come to the wrong house,” said the girl from within. “ I have no master. Who do you want?”

“ No,” said Bernard. “ This is the house, and I wish to speak to your mistress.”

“ What is your name, and to whom do you want to speak?” cried a second female voice from within.

“ Humph !” replied the invisible gentleman, struck with what he considered a lucky thought. “ Humph ! My name is Syms, and I wish to speak to Miss Read.”

Unfortunately for him Charlotte was, at this moment, descending the narrow staircase, and was told by the lady of the house that a gentleman was inquiring for her.

“ For me !” exclaimed Charlotte. “ There must be some mistake ! Nobody knows I am here.”

“ No, no. Humph !” said Bernard, imitating the voice of his recent persecutor, as closely as possible. “ It is me, neighbour

Syms. I am just come from Clapham, and have brought a message from your mother, so don't keep me in the cold, that's a good—good—humph!—girl."

Instead of any reply there was now a whispering among the females within; and then, though the door remained as before, the passage appeared to be deserted, as no notice was taken of the pseudo neighbour Syms's humphing and entreaties for admission, which he continued to growl out in character, at intervals, for several minutes, at the end of which Charlotte's voice was again heard.

"Are you there still, Sir?" she said.

"Humph!" replied Bernard. "Yes.—Where else should I be? Very strange treatment this, Miss! I can't stop much longer though, as I promised my friend Brown, whom I am visiting here, to be back in a quarter of an hour to dinner."

"I should certainly recommend you not to stop any longer," said Miss Read, "for I

assure you it will be useless ;” and then coming close to the aperture of the door, she continued, “ I know who you are, Sir.”

“ Humph ! I am neighbour Syms,” growled Bernard.

“ Do not add uselessly to the number of your falsehoods, Mr. Audrey,” whispered the young lady. “ I looked out from the area below while you were speaking just now. I need not say more. Your attempts to enter here will be in vain, and can only tend to make the person you seek unhappy. I wish you a good night, Sir.”

“ Stop, Charlotte, stop ! One word !” exclaimed the invisible gentleman ; but the young lady was gone ; and immediately afterward a female voice of authority commanded the servant-girl to “ bang the door in the fellow’s face,” an order which was literally obeyed.

After a few angry invectives, our hero began to calculate the chances for and against him, and soon came to the resolution of postponing

the attack till the following morning, when he determined to be upon the alert at an early hour.

Having thus settled his plans, and taken particular notice of the exterior of the house, he walked off the premises, with the intention of making his way back to town ; but he had not proceeded far, ere a variety of uncomfortable feelings painfully reminded him of his recent adventures. Then he thought of the figure he should cut at his hotel. To be sure, he could make his way unseen to his own room ; but then his clothes, covered with mud and soot, would be seen by other people's servants, and he must expect the ridicule of Lord Norcourt and his gay associates. It was moreover very desirable to ascertain precisely what tokens of Peter's skill and whipcord he bore about his person.

Such were his sombre cogitations when, passing a large square house standing back a short distance from the road, an empty carriage was

driven slowly out from the broad, open, gravel sweep, and two, filled with company, entered on the opposite side, and stopped at the glass doors of the mansion. It was evident that there was “a party” there, and the hour indicated it must be for the purpose of dining, while lights in most of the upper rooms showed that the inmates were somewhat numerous.

“This is just the thing!” thought Bernard. “They are now collecting in the drawing-room and will soon go to dinner. The servants will all be engaged; I know how these things are; I shall have no difficulty in finding a comfortable dressing-room in such a house; I can set myself a little to rights at any rate.”

All turned out propitiously. It was just as he had calculated; and gliding into the hall with a party of the visitors, he from thence made his way upstairs. Scarcely had he reached the landing, when a gentleman, about his own stature, came forth dressed from one of the apartments, followed by his valet, whom he told

to make himself as useful as possible at dinner, as the party would be large and servants not too numerous.

Bernard instantly took possession of the room, in which there was a good fire and every accommodation needful for his purpose. The valet of the former occupant lingered for a minute or two—put out the lights—grumbled a little about having to wait on other people, and then went his way.

After carefully shutting and locking the door, our hero relighted the candles, and made himself visible in the usual way before a full-length swing glass, which showed him such a figure as he hardly believed it possible he could have exhibited. “Humph!” said he emphatically, “I may wash myself clean, perhaps! But as for brushing these clothes and making them decent, that is quite out of the question.”

There were plenty of habiliments lying about the room, and a well-furnished wardrobe standing open. These things were very tempting;

but he resolved to avail himself merely of soap, water, and towels, with which he set to work most manfully. The trial was however to come. There could be no scruple in borrowing the slippers and dressing-gown of the stranger, and in these he stood at length purified from the foul stains of his luckless journey. But the task of dressing again! That was disgusting. The front of his shirt and cravat were covered with soot, and in vain he turned and shook them about to see if they could be made durable. "Humph!" said he, "I shall leave him as good as I take!" and so, with a trifling feeling of compunction, he resolved to indulge himself in clean linen.

This luxury made his dirty wet stockings appear yet more abominable, and induced him, conscientiously, to select a clean pair, which seemed not quite so good as his own. Then his pantaloons presented a coagulated mass of mud, gradually drying and stiffening into a compact mound. "Pshaw!" said he, "let that grum-

bling fellow brush them ! they will then be as good as ever. They were new only the other day ; and these,” turning over a pair which lay on a chair, “ these have been worn a good many times, I am sure. They are just my length though,” he continued, pulling them on, “ yes, exactly. They fit as if they were made for me. It is really very fortunate—though I don’t quite like the idea of wearing other people’s things.”

The next decision was upon the boots. They were muddy without and wet within, and from their shrunken state gave token that they were never intended for fox-hunting or dangling astride from the perch of a carriage. “ I shall leave them,” said Bernard, “ though they were built by Hoby, and are so much superior to these, which I think must have been bought at one of the ready-made cheap shops.” His nether equipments being thus adjusted, a similar judgment was pronounced upon a buff, sooty waistcoat ; and then the flaps of his coat

being much in the same condition as the boots, that likewise was abandoned, and he stood at last completely clad in the stranger's garments.

“Just in time!” said he, looking at his watch, “six o'clock; I promised Norcourt to be punctual to seven, and as I shall sport another gentleman's shirt for once, I shall be dressed for dinner in five minutes. I wish it was ready now; but I'll pick up something *'en passant'* below, just to keep body and soul together.”

Accordingly he adjourned to the hall, and helped himself to refreshment from some dishes just removed from table, washed down his hasty meal with a draught of porter, which stood there to get properly flat and “dead,” for the gothic few who dared to indulge in cheese and malt, and then made his exit. Hailed a passing stage—found that the name of the place was Hackney—and arrived in Bond Street in good time for dinner.

In reply to Lord Norcourt's inquiries, he stated that, though he did not see Alicia, he had discovered her address, and had subsequently been engaged with his lawyer in the Temple, from whence he was but just returned.

CHAPTER XXIII.

As Lord Norcourt was at breakfast alone on the following morning about noon, his valet presented him with a card, and said the gentleman was waiting below. “Captain Popwell!” exclaimed his Lordship, “I have heard the name, certainly; but I have no acquaintance with him. Show him up, however; I wonder what he can want with me!”

After the usual salutations, which were cool and aristocratically distant on the part of his Lordship, and perfectly free and easy on that of the Captain, the latter said, “Perhaps, my Lord, you may feel a little prejudiced against me, in consequence of the affair I had with

your half brother, the Major, when we were both subs—but I assure you there isn't a quieter fellow in existence—only let me alone—that's all—but Ned was devilish provoking. However, he's a good fellow, and I never wish to go out with a cooler hand. Firm as a target, my Lord—I was cursed sorry I hit him; but it couldn't be helped. Our seconds were fools, and I told mine so; and we had a pop at each other in consequence."

His Lordship replied, that as the transaction was among military men, he had always considered it to have been conducted with strict honour and propriety, and therefore could not possibly harbour an unfavourable impression against any party concerned. He then hinted that some other business probably occasioned him the honour of the present visit. "Yes, my Lord," said the Captain, "and a queer business it is. Pray—just allow me to ask you if you know any thing about that letter, and how it got into that confounded pickle?"

As he said these words, he took a dirty letter from his pocket-book, and presented it to his Lordship, upon whom he kept his eyes steadily fixed, to observe what impression would be produced.

Lord Norcourt turned it over with a fork, and seeing the address, replied instantly, that he had received it by the post, on the preceding day, and that it came from a college acquaintance, describing how delightfully he was just settled in a comfortable living in the North. “As for the dirt,” he continued, “I only know it was clean enough when I read it—but—oh, I remember—I gave it to a friend of mine now in the house, because he knows the writer as well as I do.”

“And he did not return it to you?” asked the Captain.

“No—certainly not,” replied the young nobleman.

“That is quite sufficient, my Lord,” said the Captain, taking up the letter and coolly replacing it in his pocket-book.

“ And now,” he continued, “ I hope your Lordship will not object to give me the name of the friend to whom you lent it ?”

“ Assuredly I cannot,” replied Lord Norcourt, marvelling much at the serious manner in which such an apparently insignificant request was made. “ His name is Audrey, and, as I said before, he has apartments in this hotel.”

“ I must exchange a few words with him,” observed the Captain, drily.

Lord Norcourt rang the bell, and desired his valet to inquire if our hero was within ; and, if he was, to give him the Captain’s card.”

In the course of a few minutes the messenger returned to say, that Mr. Audrey had gone out early in the morning, and had told his valet that probably he should not be back till the evening.

“ That is cursedly provoking !” exclaimed the Captain.

“ I am afraid you will have little chance of seeing him to-day,” observed his Lordship.

“ I know he has a great deal of urgent business on his hands just now; for, yesterday, he was engaged with his lawyer in the Temple all the afternoon.”

“ Are you sure of that?” asked Captain Popwell, with a look of perplexity.

“ Perfectly,” replied his Lordship; “ we dined together, and he was just able to get home in time to dress.”

“ Pray, my Lord, at what hour did you dine?” was the next question.

“ Seven, precisely,” was the reply.

“ Would you favour me with Mr. Audrey’s Christian name?” said Captain Popwell.

“ By all means,” replied the young nobleman. “ And if you wish to write to him, there are materials at your service. His name is Bernard.”

“ Bernard Audrey, B. A.” muttered the Captain.

“ As for that,” observed his Lordship smiling, “ I really cannot positively speak. He

may, however, have taken his degree, for aught I know; but we generally drop those things on leaving Oxford."

" You mistake me, my Lord," said the Captain, laughing. " I referred merely to the initials of his name. It is a most singular piece of business ! However, when I assure you, on my honour, that what I am going to ask you is not merely from idle curiosity, I trust you will answer me without reserve." On receiving a bow of assent, he continued : " Pray is not Mr. Audrey given to playing tricks— drawing the long-bow, hoaxing, and so on ? Not very particular ? I have strong grounds for suspecting that, instead of being engaged with his lawyer yesterday afternoon, he was otherwise employed, and in a manner very unworthy the character of a gentleman."

" You do him great injustice, Sir," replied the young nobleman with friendly warmth. " If you knew him as well as I do, you could not, for a moment, entertain any such suspicion.

The fact is, that his character is precisely the reverse of that which you have described ; and his strict adherence to truth is such as often to appear quite fastidious. We never could get him to join in any of our frolics in which the least approach to dissimulation was necessary, though he enjoyed all other sorts of fun as much as any man in Oxford."

"Then I 'm posed," said the Captain ; "positively stuck fast till I see him. I will not therefore trespass longer on your Lordship's time. Perhaps, if you should see Mr. Audrey before I have that pleasure, it may be as well not to mention my suspicions, as I can easily explain to him why I entertained them."

"I perfectly agree with you, sir," replied Lord Norcourt ; "it might only produce ill will, and I should be sorry to cause a quarrel."

"Never fear that, my Lord," said the Captain ; "I 'm the quietest creature alive, unless there 's a cause ; and, after what you have told me of Mr. Audrey's character, I suppose it

cannot be him, and the initials must be one of those coincidences, as they call them, which happen every now and then. However, we shall have it all out when we meet—so I won't bother your Lordship any more, but wish you a good morning, and pray make my respects to the Major when you write next."

"But my letter," said Lord Norcourt; "I must really trouble you for that, as I have no memorandum of my friend's address, and mean to write to him to-day."

"Why—it is your own, to be sure," observed the Captain, "and, therefore, I have no right to keep it: but let me entreat you not to destroy it, as it may be of importance that it should be forthcoming."

"I will preserve it carefully," said his Lordship, "dirty though it be—shocking! He must have dropped it in the street."

The unlucky epistle was then handed over, the Captain took leave,—and the young nobleman sat down to his correspondence.

Steadily fixed in his purpose, our hero had ordered his cabriolet to be in waiting as soon as it was light in the morning, and, as the clock struck eight, he drove off from the hotel.

On arriving at the corner of Piccadilly, he hesitated, and inquired of his groom which was the nearest road to Hackney.

“ Hackney ?” said the fellow, “ Hackney ! Let me see—I know there is such a place.”

“ Confound your stupidity !” exclaimed Bernard. “ So do I—But didn’t I engage you expressly because you said you knew every place about town.”

“ So I do, Sir,” replied the groom ; “ but as for knowing every hole and corner about the outskirts, I defy any body to do that, if he was to live as long as Methusaley, and be a hackney coachman all the while.”

“ Well—inquire then !” growled Bernard.

“ I say, my good fellow !” cried the groom, to a labouring man who was passing, “ can you tell which is the way to Hackney ?”

“What, I?” replied the fellow, in a strong Hibernian accent, “how would you expect any thing of that kind, when I’m lost myself every day, in this big place, let alone the fog?”

“Better ask some of the hackney coachmen,” said the groom; “there’s always some of ‘em waiting for the coming in of the night coaches.”

Our hero accordingly, in excessive ill humour, drove up alongside of “the head of the stand,” the driver of which was nodding on his box, when aroused by the groom calling out,—

“I say, Coachee! just put us in the way to Hackney, will ye? That’s a good fellow.”

“Ay, to be sure,” was the reply, “but you’re a pretty long way off. Do you know Westminster bridge?”

“Yes, to be sure,” said the groom.

“Well, you must go over that,” continued the coachman, “and drive straight forward, keeping to the left, for about a mile, and then you’d better ask again.”

Bernard thanked him, and drove furiously

down St. James's Street, while the misdirector laughed in his sleeve, and called his friend the waterman, to tell how he had “queered a flat.”

“ All’s fair with them cabs,” said he ; “ a gem-
man in his own chariot or coach is somebody ;
but t’other two-wheeled machines are neither
fish, flesh, nor good red herring, and only
serves to take honest men’s bread out of their
mouths. So let you and I have a pint of purl
upon the strength of it.”

As our hero drove over Westminster bridge,
he could not help doubting whether it was the
same road by which he had returned on the
previous afternoon ; but, as he recollects that
he put up the windows of the hackney coach,
which brought him home from the Hackney
stage, he continued to rattle along till he reached
the Lambeth turnpike gate.

“ Hackney !” exclaimed the toll-taker, in
answer to the usual query, “ why, you’re driv-
ing right away from it ; but, as you are here,
you’d better go that way,” and he pointed to

the side gate. “Drive straight on till you come to Rowland Hill’s chapel, and then turn to the left, and go over Blackfriars’ bridge.”

Away dashed Bernard, quarrelling alternately with his horse and groom ; and, after a multitude of inquiries and many perplexing mistakes, contrived, at last, to reach Hackney, about half past nine o’clock.

“Wait for me here till twelve,” said he to his groom, as he pulled up at a livery-stable ; “if I am not back by that time, drive home, and get a map of London and look over it, and make yourself fit for something if possible. I might just as well have brought a boy from the country as have taken you.”

“How should I know such an outlandish, low-lived place as this?” growled the groom, beginning to unbuckle the harness. “There’s nobody but shopkeepers, and barbers’ clerks, and such like, lives here, I’m sartain. I wonder where we shall go next ! I suppose to Wapping and Rag Fair. But service is no

inheritance; and blow me if I stand it! Here's a horse! why it'd take any fellow a good six hours to clean him properly."

During this soliloquy the master had walked off, and was reconnoitring the aspect of the various rows and places which at first, bewildered him by their resemblance to each other. Luckily, however, he recognized the house in which he had made his toilet, and its situation afforded a clue to the humbler tenement of which he was in search; so, after finding a convenient place to pull his ear, he very soon stood before the spot of Alicia's refuge.

Notwithstanding the general uniformity of the line of buildings, the very particular notice he had taken of the form of the little flower-borders might have been sufficient to prevent mistakes; but he had the satisfaction of seeing a clearer evidence of his former bodily presence, in a multitude of foul stains upon the box and gravel; and, still plainer, upon the otherwise neat white steps and threshold. No-

thing could be more cheering than the aspect of things at that moment; for the maid-servant, with brushes and pail at her side, was upon her knees, vigorously rubbing and scrubbing the said steps, in order to restore them to their wonted purity; while the door stood open, guarded only by her prostrate person. To step over that barrier was an easy task, and Bernard soon found himself in the small front parlour, where, from the state of the table, it was evident that three persons had just breakfasted.

“They keep good hours,” said he, coolly helping himself to a piece of toast. “Let me see—this corner, between the sofa and the wall, will be the snuggest place: but how very small the room is! I must really be particularly careful.”

He had scarcely established himself in his retreat, ere an elderly lady, dressed with extreme neatness and simplicity, entered the room, shut the door, and, without uttering a word,

proceeded to collect the breakfast equipage upon the tea-board, which she then placed on a side-table, rolled up the cloth, and laid it there likewise.

Her next task was to rub her well-polished mahogany ; and when that was completed, she calmly put some articles of female apparel upon the table, took a chair, and sat down to her needle-work.

“ Humph !” thought Bernard, as he looked upon the venerable old lady and her spectacles ; “ this is much more dignified than entertaining ; but in such a nutshell of a house as this, we must soon hear something of the young ladies.”

So he waited patiently for a quarter of an hour, and impatiently for another quarter, and still all was silent.

“ I will go and look for them,” said he ; “ they are in the back parlour, perhaps, or chatting up-stairs. All the better ; for it will not do to make my appearance before the old lady.”

He then, much to the surprise and annoyance of the peaceful occupier of the room, opened the door, and proceeded on his search. The back parlour was empty—so likewise were the bed-rooms, the doors and windows of which were wide open.

“ This is excessively provoking !” said he. “ I suppose they must have gone for a walk, shopping, or something of that kind. However, it can’t be long before they return. That gown on the bed is what Alicia had on yesterday ; and this is Charlotte’s work-box —it is open, I declare ! She always keeps her letters here : so when treason’s in the state, it is a folly to be nice. I ’ll just see if they have any engagements, and what is going on.”

There was a time when Bernard Audrey could not have been guilty of such meanness ; but all delicacy of feeling was now sinking within him, and almost all his words and actions were efforts of art. He had, in consequence of his invisible gift, always something to conceal, and lying and prying into the se-

crets of others had become too familiar to induce those sensations of remorse, with which he was wont to be visited at the commencement of his career. If, at the present period, any momentary qualm arose, it was quelled by the plea of necessity, which appeared quite sufficient for self-justification.

“ If the use I have made of my power produces consequences different from my intentions, how can I help it ? ” was the usual result of his brief deliberations. “ I am not to blame for what I never meant to do ; and as for scrapes and difficulties, I must get out of them as well as I can. When I am using my gift, however, I will not use it by halves, but avail myself of every advantage which it places at my disposal to effect the intended purpose.”

Such was his resolution when looking over Miss Read’s letters and notes, which afforded him as little information as possible. There was only one in which he was at all referred to, and that came from Miss Emily Hitchins,

who, calling him "that mysterious character," added, "Had Alicia unfortunately married him, she would have been disappointed respecting the title, as my brother, who heard it from one of the gentlemen employed, told me, in confidence, that Sir William had given orders to stop all further proceedings."

"Yes, yes," said Bernard, angrily returning the letters to their place, "stop them till he comes back to town. A likely thing that he'll give that up! No, no. I know the old gentleman's weakness on that point too well."

By this time he felt himself cold and uncomfortable, and resolved to go down-stairs again, and sit by the fire, with the old needle-plying lady, till the young ones should return.

"It is a most extraordinary thing what can be the matter with the door," exclaimed the poor woman, at the entrance of her invisible visitor; "if I were superstitious I should think it a warning," and she carefully

examined the lock, to ascertain the cause of such an occurrence happening twice. But not being able to make it out, she returned quietly to her seat, adjusted her spectacles, and went on with her work as before.

Bernard sate, looking alternately at her and the fire, till his patience was completely exhausted ; and he had come to the resolution of quitting the house, and returning visibly, in the character of Charlotte's brother, to ascertain where the young ladies were gone, and when they might be expected to return. He was about to rise for this purpose, when the maid-servant entered and enquired what her mistress would like for dinner, and at what hour.

“ You may hash me a little of the mutton we had yesterday,” said the old lady, “ and warm up some of the potatoes. I shall dine at my usual hour, as my young friends will not come back till night, if they do at all. But let their room be ready in case they should.”

“ Ah !” exclaimed the girl, “ I was afeard they’d be frightened away by that ruffian last night. Miss Storer turned shocking pale. He must have been a scavenger, I’m sure. I never see such a mess as the steps was in in all my born days. But they needn’t ha’ been frightened, for I should like to see the fellow as could get in here after dark.”

“ He must have mistaken the house,” said the old lady ; “ thieves seldom go where there is not something worth stealing, and what could he expect to get here !”

A sort of involuntary sigh escaped with this exclamation, the cause of which seemed to be instinctively understood by the maid, who replied—

“ La, Ma’am ! how can you talk so ? when you know you’ve got half-a-dozen silver table-spoons and half-a-dozen tea-spoons, besides the salts and the plated forks, that Mrs. Storer gave you the other day, and nobody could tell the difference.”

“ Very true, Martha,” said the mistress,

“ always be careful and put the chain up directly it is dusk.”

“ Yes, Ma’am, I always do,” replied the girl ; “ and so the young ladies is gone home.”

“ No, Martha,” said the old lady, “ the carriage would have come for them if they had ; but they went by the nine o’clock stage, on purpose to be in town in time for Mr. Somebody’s carriage. I’m sure I can’t recollect his name—he’s a great man in some Government office, and always gets there exactly at ten. They meant to go back in his carriage to his country-house, somewhere on the other side of town, to see his daughter, who was a school-fellow of their’s. So I think it’s hardly likely we shall see them here to-night, for it must be a very long way off.”

“ Nine o’clock stage,” thought Bernard, “ then I must have passed them on the road. If it had not been for that infernal coachman sending me out of the way, I should have been just in time. I’ll get rid of that block-head of mine at once.”

He was about to retreat immediately, when the old woman asked for her bonnet and cloak, and said she should go and call on a neighbour, and her exit afforded him an opportunity of slipping out at the same time, without any more inexplicable opening of doors.

Each being in an ill-humour, the natural consequence was a quarrelsome drive between master and man, which ended with the dismissal of the latter on their arrival in Bond Street.

Our hero found Captain Popwell's card on his table, and shortly afterward received a note from that gentleman, begging to know at what hour on the following morning Mr. Audrey would be at home, and requesting a reply, addressed at the Cannon Coffee-house.

Little suspecting who the writer was, Bernard wrote to say that he should be happy to receive him before two, and dismissed the matter from his mind.

He then suddenly found himself surrounded with college friends, who came rushing in in

rapid succession, in consequence of having read his name in the Morning Post among the arrivals at Long's. It was quite a levee, and ended in an engagement for dinner with a set of "choice fellows" at the Bedford.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FEW men appear to enjoy the pleasures of the table more than those who seek there a refuge from reflection. Under the influence of good cheer, surrounded with smiling, familiar faces, and listening to college reminiscences and the chat of the day, our hero was at the Bedford as gay as his companions, and seemed to have “banished every care.”

The glass was circulating after dinner, and all was going on merrily, when Lord Norcourt happened to mention the letter which he had received from his clerical friend in the North, who was well known to most of the company present. The new rector’s health was proposed

and drunk with all the enthusiasm of youthful feelings; and then his Lordship abruptly said to Bernard, who sate opposite to him, “You remember, Audrey, you never returned me that letter of his which I gave you to read.”

Our hero felt in his pockets—looked confused, and the thought flashed across his mind that he must have left it in the coat which he had exchanged at Hackney. He perfectly well remembered having removed every other article; but the letter being wet, and in an inner pocket, where he seldom put any thing but his pocket-book, had offered no resistance, and, consequently, was allowed to remain. “I have not got it here,” said he at length; “most likely I shall find it at home. I hope I have not lost it.”

“I hope not,” observed his Lordship, with feigned gravity; “it will be a most awkward thing if you have, as I must write to congratulate him, and shall want his address.”

No more was said at the time, but Bernard

soon fell into a reverie, trying to recollect whether he had really put it into the pocket of that unlucky coat, and whether, if he had, he might not have subsequently taken it out and deposited it in his writing-desk. Lord Norcourt observed the change in his manner, and for some time enjoyed his uneasiness, thinking it but a just punishment for his carelessness. At length, when our hero's sudden taciturnity was remarked by every one, the good-tempered young nobleman relented, and said, "Don't vex yourself any more about that letter, Audrey ; it is safe enough in my possession."

"Ah ! How ! Indeed ! Where ?" gasped Bernard, with an emotion apparently quite uncalled for on such an occasion.

"Look, gentlemen," continued his Lordship, taking out his pocket-book and exhibiting the letter ; "you will hardly think me too severe in keeping him a little in suspense when you see the pickle in which our reverend friend's epistle was returned to me. However, there it is, *pro*

bono publico, if any one of you will undertake to read it."

The letter was handed, or rather pushed round, and occasioned much merriment, while Bernard sate biting his lips, knitting his brows, changing colour, and casting strange glances upon Lord Norcourt, who felt quite at a loss to account for such singular conduct. "Why, Audrey," he exclaimed, "any one, to look at you, would suppose that I had accused you of some foul crime, instead of merely having fouled my letter, by dropping it in the mud."

This was like a reprieve to Bernard, who had previously fancied it barely possible that the letter might have slipped from his pocket as he went dangling through the mud upon his perch. "I suppose it must have been so," he muttered; "I am really very sorry."

"Say no more about it," replied his Lordship good-humouredly; "it was picked up and brought to me, as the address is still legible, and I have answered it, so all is well. Perhaps

I was somewhat too hard with you, for, considering that you have law business on your hands, I dare say your pocket was crowded with papers."

"Law business!" cried the president; "when a man has law in his head one ought to forgive any thing. So I suppose I must be lenient also, though he *has* had the bottles with him for somewhat about half an hour. However, do have mercy upon your neighbours, Audrey, and don't sit taking your wine as if you were *solus*. Just fill a bumper and pass it on. If I err not greatly, that will make the sixth you have had to yourself."

Of course this statement was whimsically erroneous; but Bernard had, in reality, so far forgotten himself as to be perfectly unconscious of what he did, when, under the influence of nervous irritability, he filled and tossed off a bumper, and replaced the decanter where it stood before.

Something more was said about law. The

circumstance of his being detained all the preceding day in the Temple was mentioned, and declared by all to be an intolerable bore. “Who are your lawyers, Audrey?” inquired the president; and, on hearing their names, he continued, “You can’t be in better hands: they are mine likewise, and it is singular we did not meet, for I was there yesterday, though happily not so long as you were. But they have different offices, and that accounts for it.”

The rest of the evening was spent as usual on such occasions, and our hero engaged the whole party to breakfast with him on the following morning at Long’s at twelve precisely.”

On their way home, Lord Norcourt inquired if he had been successful in finding Alicia, and was briefly answered in the negative.

“I am sorry for it,” said his Lordship; “but if I can assist you in any way, pray command me.”

“I am sure of seeing her to-morrow,” observed Bernard — “I know where she is to dine.”

“ Yes,” said his Lordship, “ but a dinner-table is not exactly the best of all possible places, unless you can contrive to sit beside her, and that, under existing circumstances, can hardly occur. You have an invitation, of course, to the party.”

“ I shall manage it,” replied Bernard ; “ let them keep me out if they can.”

Lord Norcourt said no more, for he felt somewhat hurt at the apparent want of cordiality and confidence with which his offers of service were received ; and his companion, having taken somewhat more than his usual quantity of wine, lolled back in the carriage, and remained silent till they reached their quarters, where they parted for the night.

Everybody knows that a gay bachelor’s breakfast, particularly among Oxford-men, is a very different thing from family tea and toast ; and Bernard, although in the morning he regretted having given the invitation for that particular day, resolved to have the thing done in style. Consequently, at Long’s, “ the

spread" was magnificent, and the guests mustered with laudable punctuality and in high spirits. Perhaps their little excess of the preceding evening might have imparted an unusual zest for the delicate wines now before them, and rendered the "devilish" specimens of culinary science peculiarly attractive. Whatever might be the cause, all was mirth and gaiety, in the midst of which the work of destruction had been going on for an hour, when a servant entered and announced Captain Popwell.

"Ah!" cried the president of the preceding evening, "Popwell of the ——?"

"Really I do not know," replied Bernard; "the gentleman is a perfect stranger to me, but wishes to see me about something—I have no idea what."

"Yes, it is the same," exclaimed his friend, looking at the card; "a capital fellow—you'll be delighted with him! He was visiting at a friend's where I was in the beginning of the

shooting season, and a dead hand he is at the sport, and capital over the mahogany afterwards."

" My compliments to the Captain, and request that he will walk up," said Bernard to the card-bearer, who immediately withdrew, and in about a minute the Captain made his appearance, saying to a man who accompanied him, " Wait there till I call to you;" and then he entered the room with a stiff and formal air, evidently surprised at finding himself in the presence of a dozen persons.

" My dear fellow, how are you?" exclaimed the ex-president, running up and shaking him by the hand. " Give me leave to introduce you to the gentleman you wish to see. Captain Popwell—Mr. Audrey, a very particular friend of mine."

" I am very sorry for it," said the newcomer.

" Sorry for what?" exclaimed the first speaker.

“Sorry to find you in such bad company,” was the reply. “The simple fact is, that I am here for the sole purpose of telling that same Bernard Audrey that he is a liar, a scoundrel, and a thief !”

The commotion excited by this unusual style of commencing an acquaintance was excessive : all were upon their legs in an instant, and there was some mention made of throwing the intruder down-stairs. This did not escape his ear ; and, looking round in a cool determined manner, with which his tone accorded, he said—

“One at a time, if you please—and I won’t be particular about numbers !”

“You have been led into some strange mistake, Popwell,” said the ex-president ; “Mr. Audrey is a gentleman of the strictest veracity and honour, and by no possible chance can the epithets which you have made use of be applicable to him in the slightest degree, as every gentleman here can assure you as well as myself.”

A murmur of acquiescence ran round the room, while Bernard, whose faculties seemed paralyzed by the sudden attack, sank into a chair, and gazed vacantly upon the scene before him. Several of his friends repeated somewhat to the same purpose as had been said before; but the Captain shook his head, and replied—

“Very likely, gentlemen—I dare say you tell me what you think; but facts are stubborn things: so— to the proof;” and raising his voice, he called out, “Come in, William!”

At this summons the door opened, and a servant entered carrying two bags.

Bernard looked, and it would be very difficult to describe his feelings on recognizing the grumbling valet from Hackney. Had any doubts of his identity remained, they would have been removed when the Captain, turning towards Lord Norcourt, said—

“Your Lordship probably may feel some surprise at my altered tone since yesterday, when I returned your letter: but then I had

only suspicions — now I have proofs. Just empty that blue bag, William ; turn the things out as gently as possible, or we shall have the room full of dirt.”

The valet obeyed his orders, and the floor exhibited such a suit as had seldom met the eyes of the admiring beholders. Neither brush, stick, nor the smallest effort at purification had been exercised upon any of the articles since they were cast off by their late unlucky proprietor. Notwithstanding the insult offered to their host, some of the younger guests could not help laughing at this display of old clothes.

“ It was in the pocket of this coat, my Lord,” said Captain Popwell, “ that I found your letter ;” and he proceeded to state that he was then on a visit with a gentleman residing at Hackney, and how a suit of his own had been taken away, and the filthy garments now produced left behind, at the time and in the manner already described to the reader.

During the narration of this strange tale our hero had been sitting with his head on his hand, planning the best possible mode of extricating himself from this unexpected dilemma. He was hesitating between the policy of avowing the exchange, (as a frolic, for which he had intended to make reparation,) and the possibility of getting rid of the charge altogether by lying “through thick and thin,” when he was unluckily determined to pursue the latter course, by the observation of one of his friends, that “whoever might have played the dirty trick, it could not have been Mr. Audrey, as every one present knows that he was engaged with his lawyers the whole of the afternoon when it took place.”

Bernard was about to say something, but, finding his throat parched, first tossed off a tumbler of champagne.

“Let him get out of it if he can,” observed the Captain.

“Man!” cried Bernard, assuming a bold and angry air, “I know nothing either of you

or your clothes, and should thank you to take yourself and them off as soon as possible."

"Oho! he speaks at last," said Captain Popwell contemptuously: "he knows nothing of the clothes, eh? But I'll not degrade myself by talking to the fellow. For your satisfaction, however, my Lord and gentlemen, I'll just give you a proof of his veracity: just turn up that loose part of the underside of the coat collar, William."

The man obeyed, and every one present read, in large tailor's characters, "Bernard Audrey, Esq." The boots afforded similar evidence, and the rest of the articles bore the initials B. A. All present looked at each other, then at Bernard, then at the accuser, and all seemed perfectly bewildered.

After an awkward silence for a minute, the president of the preceding evening gravely said, "Though I am firmly convinced that your suspicions are improperly directed, from what I know of our friend's character, yet I must

confess, Popwell, you have very strong grounds for entertaining them. I only regret that you have been so precipitate as to make use of words to which no gentleman can possibly submit."

"Pshaw!" replied the Captain coolly, "I was in no hurry at all, my dear fellow; I meant what I said, and I repeat that he is a—"

"No, no—nonsense!" exclaimed the ex-president, interrupting him: "do leave the matter to me for a minute." He then turned to our hero and said, "I really think, Audrey, under existing circumstances, this gentleman is entitled to *some* sort of explanation, if you can give any guess about how the clothes came into his room. Indeed I may say, you owe it to us all, and to yourself in particular."

"After the manner in which this person has thought fit to conduct himself," replied Bernard angrily, "you cannot suppose that I will submit to be questioned by *him*. But pray let me ask *you* whether, when you give away

cast-off clothes, you are in the habit of keeping company with the future wearers?"

"Then you really know nothing about the transaction?" asked his friend.

"Not I," was the reply.

The voluntary pacifier then turned to Captain Popwell, and said, "I knew it would prove to be so, and I think now you ought to be satisfied. If, however, you can possibly have any farther doubts, you need only go with me as far as the Temple, and you shall have the most respectable and satisfactory evidence that Mr. Audrey was there at the time you refer to."

"You are a good fellow, Tom," said the Captain; "I see what you would be at. You want to prevent my having a pop at him; but, to tell you the truth, I have not yet made up my mind about that matter. Empty the other bag, William."

In order to explain the nature of this fresh evidence, it will be necessary briefly to follow

the movements of Captain Popwell, from the time when he left Lord Norcourt till his unwelcome visit at the breakfast-party on the following day.

After writing a note at the Cannon for Bernard, he returned to Hackney, and was informed by his valet of the discovery which he had made of the tailor's and boot-maker's full-length designation of their customer. The mansion in which he was staying belonged to an opulent merchant in the city, with whose son the Captain had served in the Peninsula, and with whom he was now visiting. The old gentleman felt excessively indignant at the outrage committed on his premises, and gave it as his opinion that the only method of discovering who the rascal was, would be to take out a search warrant, for which there were ample grounds, against the said Bernard Audrey. At first the Captain demurred, in consequence of the supposed delinquent's being a friend of Lord Norcourt's; but that, the merchant said, was an additional

reason why he should be exposed, as young noblemen were too often imposed upon by specious villains.

“Let the warrant be put into the hands of a proper officer,” he continued, “and, as the search is merely for clothes, which are bulky, it may be managed so that the fellow shall know nothing about the matter. It is only waiting till he is out or engaged. If you do not find anything, you are but where you were; and, if you do, why then you will be going upon a certainty, and know how to proceed. As for the prosecution, I’ll take all charges of that upon myself, which is no more than I ought to do, as the robbery was committed in my house.”

In pursuance of this plan, the Captain and his brother officer repaired the next morning to Bow Street, accompanied by his valet, with the dirty clothes, of which they at once made an exhibition, with the necessary depositions, before the magistrate; and then taking with them the

warrant, and an officer to execute it, proceeded to Long's, where they arrived while the gay party were in the middle of their *dejeuné à la fourchette.*"

No time could have been more appropriate for the intended purpose, as Andrews was busily engaged attending upon his master's guests. There was much surprise and some merriment among the waiters at the idea of such a gentleman as Mr. Audrey being suspected of stealing another person's clothes ; and, after a brief consultation, the most influential and sapient among the silk-stockings tribe decided, that it was not worth while to disturb him, as the officer only wanted to examine his wardrobe, and said he should meddle neither with desks, dressing-cases, nor anything that might be supposed to contain valuable articles. The search was therefore made, and every garment found to correspond with a written paper, previously given to the searcher, who forthwith somewhat perplexed the Captain, by saying that he must take the prisoner back with him.

"I must speak to him first, however," said he.

"That's as you please, Sir," replied the officer, "but mind, if he escapes, you must bear me harmless."

The Captain was excessively irritated at finding himself thus likely to be disappointed of the only sort of satisfaction which he had ever been in the habit of exacting for injuries received. It was impossible for him to think of "going out" with a fellow who was about to cut a figure at Bow Street, and probably would be committed to Newgate and tried for burglary : and, his vexation at this was, perhaps, the reason why he so suddenly and freely gave his opinion of our hero's character.

Having now accounted for the filling of the second and most formidable bag of old clothes produced in evidence, we return to the breakfast party.

"The various articles you see here," said the Captain, "were stolen from my room at the

time in question, and have just been found in that of your most veracious friend."

At this assertion there was more staring than before. The ex-president alone appeared determined not to give the matter up, for he was a thorough-going, warm-hearted fellow, who would rather have parted with his last shilling than abandon the cause of a friend in trouble. Firmly convinced himself, he with steady firmness repeated his conviction of Mr. Audrey's honour and veracity—again lamented that the Captain had commenced the interview in a manner which he feared had produced, on the part of the accused, an unwillingness to explain, lest his compliance should be attributed to unworthy motives; and concluded by hinting, that he himself suspected some of the people about the house.

This latter suggestion, while it staggered Captain Popwell for a moment, produced a most unfortunate effect upon our hero. He had been sitting apparently in the sulkiness of

offended honour, but in reality studying what move he should make next, like a chess-player defending himself against a complicated attack. Almost at his wit's end, but sensible that he had gone too far in lying to adopt any other system, he caught eagerly, as a drowning man at a twig, at the chance of shifting the whole transaction from his own shoulders to those of some other person.

“ There is no doubt that it must be as our friend says”, he observed, in a low voice to Lord Norcourt; “ but, what on earth would you have me do, after being insulted in such a manner? Can I—ought I to submit to this person’s farther rudeness? What more can I say than that I know nothing about the matter?”

“ Really I know not,” replied his Lordship; and then rising and taking the ex-president by the arm, he led him to the window, where they whispered awhile to each other, and in consequence our hero was advised to retire for a short time into the next room, and leave his case in the hands of his friends.

"I have no doubt," whispered the ex-president to him as he was departing, "no doubt at all that we shall soon bring Popwell to listen to reason; for he is really a very good fellow at bottom, though sometimes confoundedly obstinate when he takes a thing into his head."

So far from feeling any compunction on account of the falsehoods of which he had just been guilty, Bernard was no sooner alone than he began to arrange the outlines of a plan, which the more he thought of, the more fully he felt convinced would answer his own purpose. As for the feelings and sufferings of others, if they had not yet become perfectly indifferent to him, they were matters of very minor importance, when compared with the task of self-preservation. His character, and the retaining of the friendship of his acquaintance, were at stake, and he determined not to do things by halves. Perhaps if he had been allowed more time for reflection on all the various bearings of the case, his scheme might have been better digested; but it was necessary to

act immediately ; and therefore he took the first step, by summoning Andrews, and informing him that he must go down to Audrey Hall without losing a moment.

“ Here,” said he, “ is the key of the closet in my room, where I keep my books and papers. You will find a red portfolio on the third shelf on the left-hand side. You must pack it up with its contents, and send it to me by return of coach, and then wait there till you hear from me, as I expect, in a day or two, to want other documents from the same place, and should not like to trust the key to any other person. I am sorry that I cannot give you more time to prepare for your journey ; but the gentleman in the next room has but just informed me that the papers are wanted and the business is urgent. So —don’t lose a moment ; it is now past two, and the coach goes from Bishopsgate Street exactly at three. You must take a hack, and drive fast, or you will not be in time.”

“ So far all is well,” said Bernard, when his

valet had left him again alone ; “ the only witness against me is now removed. So—let me think over the rest coolly ;” and he proceeded to walk up and down the room, muttering at intervals, “ Yes — it will do. Serve the fellow right too. He deserves some punishment ; for I am sure he lamed that horse purposely.—There really ought to be some law by which one could obtain redress for such rascality—but the ends of strict justice will be as well attained in the way I propose. So — that is settled.”

“ I am commissioned to invite you to return to us, Audrey,” said one of his friends, entering with a smile, which augured well of the result of the conference.

The first person that addressed him on his return was Captain Popwell, who with a manly frankness, which raised him much in the opinion of his youthful hearers, said, “ I am afraid I have made a fool of myself, Mr. Audrey. It is impossible to withstand what all these gentlemen

have said in your favour. I am convinced that I accused you wrongfully ; but I was in a confounded passion, and used words which I now believe to be not at all applicable to you. I have no hesitation in saying, that I am sorry for both blunders, and if that is not sufficient, am ready to make any farther apology our friends think fit, or to give you any other satisfaction you may require as a gentleman."

" That is quite sufficient !" exclaimed the peace-making ex-president.

" Perfectly so, I should think," observed Lord Norcourt.

But there were others present who thought that the Captain ought distinctly to ask pardon for having used such very opprobrious terms.

Bernard, in the mean while, had preserved a dignified silence, and replied only by a stiff bend of the head.

After a momentary scowl at those who had talked of his asking pardon, Captain Popwell observed, " We had better leave such matters

to be discussed by our mutual friends. In the interim, however, I trust Mr. Audrey will not refuse to give me any information which may lead to the discovery of the fellow who has caused all this mischief."

"Certainly not!"—"Nothing can be more reasonable."—"Of course he cannot object," came from various quarters; and after much hesitation, and expressing considerable reluctance at being compelled to divulge his suspicions, Bernard said, that he had given the clothes in question to his groom, with whom, in consequence of his insolence, he had since been compelled to part.

"The scoundrel told me I should repent of it," he continued, "and I thought he had made his threat good, when I found my cabriolet horse, for which I gave a hundred and fifty guineas the other day, completely lamed. This, I am afraid, must be another of his schemes, as he had free access to my bed-room."

Vehement indignation and loud execrations

were vented against the supposed offender. The waiters were summoned, and inquiry made where he was to be found. It was ascertained that he had been seen about the premises that morning ; and the servant of a gentleman in the house deposed, that he had heard him say, Mr. Audrey would soon be sorry that he had turned him off. This evidence was corroborated by that of some of the underwaiters ; and, at length, when the party broke up, every one went his way, perfectly convinced that Bernard had been most exceedingly ill-used.

Captain Popwell repeated his willingness to make any farther apology indicated by two mutual friends ; but as the ex-president was about to take orders, he begged to decline making one, where there was even the possibility of a *rencontre* ; and, therefore, Bernard accepted the offer of another friend, and appointed him to meet whomever the Captain should name.

CHAPTER XXV.

AN hour after the closing of the scene described in the end of the last chapter, our hero was about to repair to Russell-square, for the purpose of observing what would pass at the family dinner, to which Sir Marmaduke and his nephew had been invited, and, likewise, with the determination of not leaving the house till he should have obtained an interview with Alicia.

“ I ought to write to my uncle this evening,” said he ; “ this is the day on which I resolved ‘ to tie myself up’ from vanishing ; but I must defer it at least till to-morrow, for the oath once taken, there is an end of my power, and,

without it, I'm afraid there would be little chance of my being able to see her in private. One day cannot make much difference."

"Here is a person, Sir," said a waiter, hastily entering, "who says he must see you directly on urgent business." The messenger, who had followed closely, came forward and announced himself as belonging to Bow-street, where Mr. Audrey's presence was required immediately, to give evidence against a man accused of robbery.

In such a case there could be no flinching. He felt that he had gone too far to retract, and therefore accompanied the messenger, consoling himself with the thought that Bow-street was in the way to Russell-square.

On his arrival at the office, he found that the indefatigable Captain and his assistant had succeeded in capturing the groom, who stoutly denied the accusation made against him.

As the justice's clerk happened, at the moment, to be engaged with some official papers,

his Worship chatted in a free and easy way with the gentlemen, previous to going regularly to business, and Bernard, in corroboration of the Captain's assertion, said that he had certainly given the dirty clothes to the prisoner. This affirmation was heard by all present, and, soon after, the accused was brought up in due form, and the charge and manner of the robbery stated by Captain Popwell. Of what he said, and the subsequent depositions of his valet and the officer, Bernard heard but little, from the very unpleasant feelings consequent upon the position in which he had now placed himself. The necessary and formal solemnity of taking an oath had not occurred to him before ; and, accustomed as he was to falsehoods in general, he was shocked at the idea of perjury. But there appeared to be no retreat. He must either repeat on oath what he had before stated, or abandon his scheme of self-exoneration. The conflict was sharp, but, we are sorry to add, short ; and he endeavoured

to justify his unjustifiable decision by the usual plea of necessity, and that it was not his fault, but that of the pale-faced elderly gentleman, who had entrapped him, by means of his pernicious gift, into a series of perplexities. Still, when it was his turn to speak, and the book was handed to him, there was a hesitation in his manner, and he ventured to appeal to Captain Popwell whether, as the affair was merely an exchange of clothes, and he had recovered his own, it was worth while to go on with the prosecution to the utmost extent of the law.

“ Your humanity does credit to your heart, Mr. Audrey,” observed the justice, “ but I am sorry to say it is injurious to the cause of the prisoner, as no one but the basest of characters would have so conducted himself toward such a master. We must proceed.”

The Captain said somewhat to the same effect, and added that, even if he were disposed to drop the prosecution, it would be taken up by the gentleman in whose house the robbery had

been committed. The result was, that Bernard took his oath, and declared that he had given the clothes in question to the prisoner on the morning of the robbery.

As the words passed his lips it seemed to him as if there was a hollow chuckling laugh close to his ear, and he turned sharply round, expecting to see the indistinct pallid countenance of the stranger.

“ What an infernal lie !” exclaimed the accused, “ he never gave me any clothes in his life.”

“ Such language is only likely to make matters worse for you, John Stubbs,” observed the magistrate. “ Let me advise you to keep a civil tongue in your head, and not offend a master who has just given proof that he would not have been an evidence against you if he could have avoided it. I am willing to hear now what you have to say in your defence, but warn you not to criminate yourself, nor harden the hearts of others against you.”

“All I’ve got to say is,” replied the prisoner, “that he never gave me a stitch of clothes, and I never was at Hackney in my life till yesterday morning, when I went with him in his cabriolet, and he quarrelled with me because I didn’t know the way, and we lost ourselves several times.”

Bernard corroborated this latter statement; but the magistrate shook his head, and seemed to consider the prisoner’s ignorance of the road to a place so well-known as Hackney to be affected.

Poor John Stubbs was then regularly committed for trial.

As Bernard was leaving the office, a servant put a note into his hand, and opening it, he read as follows:—

“DEAR AUDREY,

“I am sorry to say, that Captain Popwell’s friend, Captain Brown, is a most unreasonable sort of person, and that it will be absolutely necessary for you to remain at

home, till you either see or hear from me. Do not, on any account, stir out, as we expect Popwell back every minute, and the only chance of settling the business amicably, will be quickness of communication, and a show of willingness on your side, to give a meeting if required.

“ Yours in haste,

“ J. WILLIAMS.”

“ Cannon Coffee-House, quarter-past-four.”

At the bottom of the note was written, in small characters.

“ P.S.—*Cut this off.* I suspect, from the vapouring style of a certain person, that there is a white feather in the case.”

Vexed beyond measure, and surprised somewhat that there should be any difficulty in the affair, after the open and candid manner in which the Captain had expressed himself, Bernard took a hackney-coach, and drove back to Long’s.

“As for staying at home all the evening,” thought he, “I will do nothing of the kind, for I am determined to see Alicia, so, when Williams comes, I shall tell him that I am particularly engaged.”

Now, the said Williams was, of all Bernard’s acquaintance, the most unfit for the task he had undertaken. Such is too frequently the case with volunteers on similar occasions. Ensign Williams had but recently got his commission, his parents having, after a vain resistance of some years, agreed to his entering the army instead of the church. A Welshman by birth, full of high, flighty notions of honour, and irritable to excess ; his temper had been farther soured by the delay of his appointment, and his consequent backwardness in his profession. The appearance of Captain Brown, a man little older than himself, but who had, nevertheless, seen service and obtained promotion, stung him with envy, and produced within him a determination to show, at least, his equality, by all the

self-willed stubbornness of ignorance and inexperience. He insisted that as the insult given to his friend was public, Captain Popwell should ask pardon for the offence with equal publicity. Captain Brown coolly observed, that such a course was quite out of the question, as his friend had already declared, before all who were present at the moment when he committed himself, that he did not believe the words he had used were at all applicable to Mr. Audrey, and that he was sorry for having uttered them.

“This,” he continued, “ought, in my opinion, to be sufficient: but, as the matter may be misrepresented at a future time, I will make a proposition which appears to me to be certain of answering every purpose. Captain Popwell is a man of honour, and of unquestioned bravery, and I feel confident will not refuse, at my request, to put the words he has spoken on paper. This is going to the extreme length, and certainly I would not propose it, unless I

considered that he was very much to blame for his rashness; and that his courage is not only undoubted, but that he is perfectly able and willing to prove it, if, by any chance, it should ever be called in question."

The Ensign said that such a letter would by no means satisfy him, and referred to Captain Popwell's words, "farther apology."

"Now," argued he, "what you propose is the same, and not a farther apology, and therefore cannot have been the meaning of your friend."

"He has placed his honour in my keeping now," observed Captain Brown gravely, "and I shall not consent to his going a step farther."

The Ensign remained obstinate and immovable, and of the rest of their conversation it need only be said that, though the Captain's temper was sorely tried by the rude uncouth manners of the sub, he restrained himself, and evinced throughout a wish to bring the affair to an amicable conclusion.

This desire, which he took no pains to conceal, arose from the conviction that our hero had been insulted, without having given the smallest provocation; and he thought it a hard case that, under such circumstances, a peaceable man should be obliged to go out with such a dead shot as Captain Popwell. The Ensign, however, interpreted his wish to avoid extremities in the way expressed at the bottom of his note.

While their debate was going on at the Cannon, Bernard walked to and fro in his room, till his patience was quite exhausted, and then wrote the following note to the guardian of his honour.

“ DEAR WILLIAMS,

“ It is impossible for me to wait any longer for you, having a most particular engagement. I leave the whole business in your hands. Do just as you like, and I shall be satisfied. You will be pretty certain of finding

me before twelve, if you can wait—if not, leave a note.

“Yours in haste,
“B. AUDREY.”

“N. B. I observe what you say in your P. S. So much the better, as I should certainly like to have an ample apology.”

“There,” said he, sealing and throwing the note on the table, “so much for that. Now for Alicia, and that coxcomb of a Lieutenant, and his artful old uncle. I’ll spoil their sport. And old Storer himself too! One would think from his manner that he really thought it a doubtful case whether his daughter would ever get a husband or not. His conduct is perfectly ridiculous!”

It is but right to observe that, at the commencement of this day of adventures, our hero had sate down to the breakfast-table, with the resolution of enjoying himself and making his

friends comfortable. As has been before hinted, he succeeded perfectly in this hospitable intention up to the time of Captain Popwell's unwelcome visit, during which, either from vexation or forgetfulness, he added a few more glasses of wine to the "*quantum suff.*" which he had previously taken. This is not mentioned as any alleviation or justification of his abominable proceedings in the affair of poor Stubbs, but simply to account for a certain stolidity which he seems to have evinced during the succeeding transactions. Had his breakfast been of the usual temperate kind, he would probably have discerned that his nefarious scheme, of sacrificing the groom for the preservation of his own honour, was not such a straightforward game as to be played without risk; and he must, assuredly, have hesitated ere he could have entirely abandoned the management of an evidently delicate task, into the hands of one concerning whom he knew so little as of Ensign Williams.

So, however, it was ; and after throwing his letter on the table, and himself into a hackney-coach, he resolved to dismiss that affair entirely from his mind, and to stick to the business in hand, namely, Alicia.

It was six o'clock when he alighted at the corner of Russell Square, made himself invisible by the dark railings of the pleasure-ground, and walked towards the well-known door, before which a coach stopped at the instant of his arrival.

“ Is your master at home, eh ? ” asked a gruff voice from the vehicle, as soon as a footman made his appearance.

While the man advanced from the door to reply in the affirmative, Bernard walked into the house, and taking his stand outside of the dining-room, resolved to wait a favourable moment for making his *entrée*.

The servant who had answered the front door, almost immediately made his appearance with a card ; and, as another footman was

coming out at the same instant, the door of the parlour remained open for a sufficient time to allow the invisible spy to slip in.

On observing a large skreen, which protected the party from any external air that might find its way through the doors, he congratulated himself exceedingly, as such an arrangement would allow him free ingress and egress during the evening, without exciting curiosity. Walking round this barrier, he saw the party whom he expected, and felt not a little indignant at the arrangement of the table, by which Charlotte and Sir Marmaduke were placed on one side, facing Alicia and the Lieutenant.

“ Glad to see him !” said Mr. Storer, looking at the card just brought in. “ Show him up ! Good fellow, Sir Marmaduke. Vote for you too—rough diamond, though. Leave those woodcocks, Thomas—pick a bit, perhaps—dined though, dare say—knows my hour.”

In the course of another minute, a bustle was heard behind the huge skreen, from whence,

soon after, emerged the substantial figure of Bernard's Clapham man-trap acquaintance, neighbour Syms, who came forward, puffing, awkwardly bowing and humphing, and stammering, " Didn't know you had company, or I shouldn't have come in."

" Glad you didn't then," said Mr. Storer, and, stretching out his hand, without rising, he welcomed his visiter, briefly introduced him to his guests, ordered a chair, and continued, " No ceremony—sit down. Dined, suppose—pick a bit though.—Knife and fork, Thomas.—Two glasses of madeira, Charles."

It soon appeared that Mr. Storer knew his man, for though neighbour Syms declared that he had dined, and merely came to take a glass of wine and a chat, it was evident that he could still " pick a bit."

The invisible gentleman looked upon all present with an evil eye, though he thought, sometimes, that Alicia was paler than usual, and once or twice, when she started as a servant passed behind her chair, and glanced

timidly round, he fancied she might be thinking of him. The next minute, however, she would be engaged, and, apparently, perfectly at ease, in conversation with her neighbour, and then, scrutinizing each motion, word, and look, the jealous spy felt convinced that she, likewise, was endeavouring to captivate his oratorical, fire-eating, hot-house-building rival.

Jealousy is a mean passion, and it suggested to him the possibility of making the Lieutenant appear ridiculous. Though not deeply versed in the mysteries of the female heart, he knew that awkward persons are seldom acceptable to the sex ; so he contrived, as the young officer was presenting her with some trifle, to give the plate a twitch, and deposit the foaming, creamy contents in the poor girl's lap. How the accident could have happened was incomprehensible to the Lieutenant : but, as nothing remained save to apologize, he got through that unpleasant task as well as possible, and the affair went off with a good-humoured laugh.

“ Suppose thought was at sea,” observed

Mr. Storer—"made allowances for ship's motion, eh?"

"I cannot conceive how it was," said the young man: "it must have been a touch of St. Vitus's dance, I suppose, for if I had not had my eyes open, I could have sworn that I felt some one twitch the plate out of my hand."

As he said these words, Alicia turned deadly pale, shuddered, and exchanged a significant glance with Charlotte. Luckily, as Bernard thought, this circumstance appeared not to have been noticed by the rest of the company; but he felt that it would be dangerous to execute any similar feats of the kind just performed. Still he could not bear the idea of allowing the Lieutenant to escape so easily, and managed, during the dessert, to saturate his doily and stain his buff waistcoat with wine.

The next person whom he determined to persecute was neighbour Syms, not only on account of the grudge he owed him for his

officiousness at Clapham, but because he wished to drive him away, with the hope that, if Mr. Storer and Sir Marmaduke were left together, he might hear something to enable him to judge of their plans and wishes on the subject of most importance to him.

Availing himself of his persecutor's propensity for wine, he provided a sufficient quantity of cayenne pepper, and by dropping a few grains into each successive glass, set the poor man coughing and humping in a manner which amused him exceedingly.

The ladies now rose to retire.

“ Well,” thought Bernard, “ there is nobody drinking madeira now but old Humph ; so I’ll flavour his decanter at once, and go with the ladies. I can return here when I like, in case no immediate opportunity occurs of speaking with Alicia.”

The Lieutenant was about to open the door, when Charlotte stepped hastily forward and prevented him.

“Don’t ask questions,” she whispered, “but go back to your place. Mr. Storer has a particular objection to any sort of ceremony.”

The young man bowed and obeyed, and the lady let her companions through, and passed out herself, in a manner which so plainly told Bernard that his invisible presence was suspected, as to prevent him from following immediately.

“I must not venture to open the door now,” said he, when it was closed in his face, “she will be upon the watch. That cannot last long, however.”

“You don’t help yourself, Syms,” observed Mr. Storer: “Prefer any other wine?—Thought liked madeira, eh?”

“Humph! my mouth’s out of taste, I think,” was the reply; “or else your cook’s hand has been a little too heavy with the cayenne. I’ll try a glass of port.”

It was all the same. Bernard was at hand with his invisible ingredients.

“ It is a most extraordinary—humph—thing ! ” exclaimed neighbour Syms, “ You don’t put pepper in your wine, do you ? ”

“ Believe not,” said Mr. Storer, laughing, “ soon get rid of the taste.—Take a bumper or two.—Don’t find pepper, eh, Sir Marm’duke ?—eh, Captain ? ”

Both gentlemen replied that they could not perceive the smallest flavour of the kind ; and as they had all filled from the same decanter, poor Syms endeavoured to believe that he must either be fanciful, or that he had yet the taste of the woodcock in his mouth, and it would soon go off.

“ My dear ! I wish to speak a word with you here ! ” cried Mrs. Storer, from behind the skreen ; “ I will not detain you a minute.”

This sort of interruption was so utterly out of all regular order, that Mr. Storer started up in alarm, and was at the door in an instant, while Bernard, equally upon the alert, stood at his side, and heard the whispered communication, the

substance of which was, that the girls were convinced that “that horrid creature Bernard Audrey” had somehow contrived to gain admission into the house. She mentioned the precautions they had taken when leaving the room; “and, therefore,” she added, “if you hear the door open, you will let us know. We are all upon the watch.”

“Scoundrel!” said the merchant, “if he’s here, shall catch it—no use talking, though. Hears us, perhaps—leave it to me.”

The lady then withdrew in the same cautious manner as before, and Mr. Storer immediately folded back two leaves of the skreen, so as to allow him to keep the door in sight, and then returned to his friends.

“Nothing very particular, I hope?” said Sir Marmaduke, observing an air of embarrassment and vexation on the countenance of his host.

“No;” replied the merchant. “Cursed provoking—perplexing—too long story to tell—

hardly believe it myself—fellow took us all in—sold himself to old Scratch—never mind—get paid for it some day. Let's take a glass of wine."

"I must contrive to get out of the room with some unsuspecting person," thought Bernard, "and I should think that neighbour Syms cannot stand his ground much longer."

"Really," observed Sir Marmaduke, "your wine merchant uses you well, my dear Sir. When I have tasted some people's port, I have not wondered at their preferring French wines; but this has all the fine flavour that generous wine should have, mellowed by age. In this climate, particularly winter, I am convinced there is nothing so good for our English constitutions."

"Nothing!" exclaimed the Lieutenant; "nothing like your old black-strap for Old England. We get hold of some capital light wines in the Mediterranean; but I always come back to the old taste when I get home, though not

always on first landing, as your sea-port tavern wines are not exactly like this, Sir."

"No, no," said Mr. Storer, who prided himself somewhat on the contents of his cellar. "My plan won't suit them. Honest wine-merchant—job to find him, though—got one, believe.—Give him his price—pick and choose.—If you save ten or twenty pounds per pipe—comes out of quality, first cost, mind that. Not out of duty—see? People don't think o' that. Twenty per cent. saved in gross payment—forty per cent. lost in quality—see? Got rid o' the pepper, Syms, eh?"

"Humph," grunted the sufferer, "I never was in such a—humph! I can hardly speak—state in my life. My mouth's all on fire—throat too."

"Take a tumbler of water," said Mr. Storer.

"Humph! water doesn't agree with me," was the reply.

"Afraid it's a long time since you tried it," said Mr. Storer, jocosely. "There—fill it up

with wine.—Toss it off! Thirsty, that's all.—Good draught set all right."

As this recommendation was obeyed, Bernard let fall a quantity of the tormenting red powder, proportionate to the size of the glass, and poor neighbour Syms having stirred the abominable mixture well with a spoon, swallowed the whole in an instant, and then sate gasping for breath.

"Better now, eh?" inquired his host. The only reply was a fit of sneezing, varied with 'humphs!' between each explosion.

"Ay, ay! get rid of it that way," observed Mr. Storer. "Taste gone, now?"

"Humph!" growled the victim, "I wish—umph! — a — a — atischoo — oo — humph — it was." And again he sneezed, blew his nose, and wiped his eyes, which were goggling with pain, wonder, and fear.

Expressions of condolence were uttered by the other three gentlemen, but they appeared to be lost upon the poor man, who rose from

his chair, walked to and fro for a minute with open mouth—then swore he could not endure it any longer, but would go and ask Mrs. Storer to give him a cup of tea. While he hastily uttered this determination, he rushed out, and was adroitly accompanied by our invisible hero to the drawing-room, where the lady of the house was sitting alone.

Rapid as the movement was, Mr. Storer started from his seat, and setting the door ajar, listened attentively to the ascending footsteps, and being convinced that two persons were upon the stairs, immediately decided how to act.

“ She must come to tea,” said Bernard to himself, “ therefore it is not worth while to go wandering about the house and running risks; for as they suspect that I’m here, they will have locked the door wherever they may be. I am determined, however, not to leave the house without speaking to her, if I stay here for a week.”

Neighbour Syms soon experienced some re-

lief from the attentions of his goodnatured hostess, but was still far from being easy either in body or mind. The more he thought, the more inexplicable his sensations appeared, and at length he arrived at the fearful apprehension that he had been poisoned, and spake of it to Mrs. Storer, who declared the thing to be impossible, as every one present at table must in that case have suffered equally. When her guest, however, declared he should go instantly to a doctor's, she insisted upon his remaining where he was till the arrival of medical aid, for which she immediately despatched a messenger.

“ If you should really be unwell,” she continued, “ it would be highly improper for you to think of going to Clapham to-night ; and as you said they would not expect you, I have ordered a fire in your bed-room here, and you will, I hope, find every thing comfortable. But depend upon it, there is nothing the matter, only our cayenne pepper is particularly strong,

as it was given to Mr. Storer by one of his captains."

According to this arrangement, neighbour Syms walked off to his dormitory on the arrival of the doctor, and soon after his departure, the three gentlemen from the dining-room made their appearance.

Their manner of entering the drawing-room amused Bernard exceedingly, as Mr. Storer slipped in first, and putting his foot against the door, allowed it only to open sufficiently for his companions to pass singly, and then instantly closed it and turned the key.

"A little too late, old gentleman," thought our hero.

"Take a seat by my old woman, Sir Marmaduke," said the merchant. "Where are the girls? Talking secrets, I suppose."

Instead of replying, Mrs. Storer handed him a slip of paper, which he read, and then continued :

"Couldn't have managed better! Clever

body, my wife, Sir Marm'duke ! Where's Syms?"

The lady stated what had occurred.

"Poisoned ! Capital joke that !" exclaimed her husband. "Well, well. Little doctor's stuff do him no harm. Too fat by half. Fond of turtle—eats too much—always dining with his Company. Go and see him presently."

Then turning round, he addressed the Lieutenant: "Looking at the pictures, eh ? Tell me mustn't have 'em in a drawing-room. Where then, wonder ? Not in a dining-room—sure of that. Set people gaping when ought to be eating. Tell me that's a good painting you're opposite now. Vander something—forget the fag-end of his name. Look about though—please yourself—no ceremony. Do as if you were at home—like you the better."

The Lieutenant appeared as if resolved to take full advantage of this permission, and continued to examine the various performances, in a manner which was extremely perplexing to

the invisible gentleman, who contrived with difficulty to avoid coming in contact with him, as he stepped suddenly backward, then sideways, and shifted his position continually, as if to catch the proper lights.

“The fellow has taken too much wine,” thought Bernard. “All the better! Alicia will be disgusted with him.”

The elders had already begun to sip their coffee; but still the sailor continued his erratic movements, in a style which served to convince Bernard of the truth of his suspicions. Sometimes he would stand perfectly still, as if struck with admiration at what he saw; and then turn suddenly round and reel across the room in an opposite direction. Sorely annoyed by these eccentric movements, our hero took an opportunity of sheltering himself behind one of the curtains, when all eyes were turned in a different direction, and shortly after he had the pleasure of seeing his rival seated at the table.

“ It is very extraordinary that Alicia and Charlotte are not here !” thought he, and then the real state of the case flashed upon him, that they had abruptly departed, in consequence of the suspicion excited during dinner. “ Yes,” he continued, “ I see it now ! And the purport of the paper which Mrs. Storer handed to her husband is explained. Fool that I was to give way to ridiculous fancies at such a critical moment !”

He forthwith began to reflect on what step he should take next, and had not arrived at any decision, when the question was settled for him in a very unexpected manner.

The Lieutenant, having played with his coffee-cup for some time, in silence, suddenly started up and recommenced his peregrinations.

“ Fond of walking about a room, you sailors ! —always do,” observed Mr. Storer.

“ Yes—it is a way we have,” replied the young officer. “ This is a good large room

of your's, Sir," he continued, striding across it; "plenty of room for exercise! Let me see—one, two, three," and counting his steps, the last came upon the curtain behind which Bernard stood. His rival's foot was on his, but still he moved not, hoping that it might be mistaken for a fold of the drapery, or some other inanimate substance.

The next moment, however, convinced him of his error, as he found himself firmly grasped by his adversary, the curtain being still between them.

"Hurrah! I've got him," shouted the Lieutenant.

"Hold him fast!" exclaimed Mr. Storer.

"Ay, ay," replied the captor.

But his invisible prisoner commenced a violent struggle, in the course of which the curtain fell down, and was adroitly shifted by the sailor over his opponent's head, and then drawn tightly round his body, so as to prevent any farther resistance.

By this time both were on the ground.

“Leave his head out!” cried the merchant.

“Ay, ay,” replied the sailor, “I’ve got him as snug as a fly in a cobweb. Just pull the curtain out to its full length, along the floor.”

Mr. Storer did as he was desired, and the athletic Lieutenant, having now got his antagonist completely in his power, first felt for, and released his invisible head, and then proceeded to roll him up in the outspread curtain, after the fashion of an Egyptian mummy.

The ceremony of pulling him into sight, by a sharp jerk of the right ear, was enacted by Mr. Storer, not in the most gentle manner.

The reader will now perceive what the three gentlemen had been talking of over their wine. The merchant told his guests the strange story, observing that, for Sir William’s sake, he had intended to have kept it a secret; but, as the scoundrel continued to persecute his daughter, (who was determined never to have any thing to say to him,) he conceived himself fully justified in

stating the circumstances to his particular friends, and asking their advice and assistance. The Lieutenant, of course, volunteered his services, and his admiration of the paintings was a feint to enable him to move to all quarters of the room without suspicion—the final examination of the curtains was an after-thought.

The swaddled captive was forthwith stuck up in a corner, and looked especially sheepish, during a lecture with which Mr. Storer favoured him. Sir Marmaduke added a few words of advice—and then a consultation was held relative to the disposal of his body.

The result was the process of unrolling, which was no sooner finished than the Lieutenant seized him by one arm and the collar of his coat, so as to prevent effectual resistance, and marched him down-stairs, the merchant himself opening the street-door.

“I shall expect satisfaction for this insult,” said the enraged Bernard.

“No doubt,” murmured the young officer;

“but, scoundrel as you are, I have not done with you yet,” and, on the threshold of the door, he gave him the most offensive of all possible kicks, pushed him down the steps, and threw a card after him.

CHAPTER XXVI.

DISAPPOINTED in his intention of communicating with Alicia, and indignant beyond measure at the insults he had received from his formidable rival, Bernard walked off from Russell Square, breathing nothing but vengeance. It seemed to him that all his former difficulties and sufferings were perfectly insignificant, when compared to the outrage just inflicted upon him ; and so determined and impatient did he feel to obtain satisfaction, that he went into a coffee-house and indited a challenge to Lieutenant Bonus, appointing the meeting for the next morning at any hour and place his adversary should name.

Then, that there might be no mistake, in consequence of employing a messenger, he took the letter himself to Harley Street, and subsequently walked home, seemingly having quite forgotten the affair of Captain Popwell.

He entered his own room parched with thirst, and ordered the waiter in attendance to bring him a sandwich and a bottle of claret. On the table lay the card of his friend Williams.

“The gentleman has called several times, sir,” said the man. “The last time was a quarter of an hour ago, and he bade me say that he should be sure to be here again at twelve, if not before.”

It was now but a quarter after ten. He began restlessly to pace the room, and as every kind of reflection was painful, endeavoured not to think at all. But thought would intrude, and, though far from being naturally a coward, he had not been sufficiently accustomed to the smell of powder to feel perfectly at

ease, relative to the appointment of the morning.

“By the by,” thought he, “I have no duelling pistols? I dare say, though, that Norcourt will lend me his.”

Then, finding on inquiry, that his Lordship’s carriage was ordered in ten minutes, he wrote a short note, expressing a wish to say a few words to him before he went out.

In about a quarter of an hour he received the following reply, formally inclosed under cover and sealed.

“LORD NORCOURT begs to inform Mr. Audrey, that he went this morning, accompanied by a friend, to his lawyers in the Temple, and heard with astonishment, that they had not seen Mr. A. for several days. Referring to the repeated statements made by Mr. A. (since strengthened, it seems, upon oath,) Lord N. begs to say, that, unless this strange circumstance can be explained in a perfectly

satisfactory manner, all farther communication between Mr. Audrey and himself must be at an end."

The effect wrought by the perusal of this note was somewhat like that produced by a stunning blow. Our hero sank upon the sofa, and continued motionless, till aroused by the opening of his door, and the announcement of a visitor.

"Lieutenant Robert Stiff, R. N." was inscribed on the card; and when the gentleman made his appearance, he briefly added, "A friend of Lieutenant Bonus's."

Bernard requested him to be seated.

"No, no," said the rough sailor, who was a dark-haired, bushy-whiskered, beetle-browed, short, thickset man, about thirty, buttoned to the chin in a blue surtout. "No, no! I'm not come to parley. Only to arrange time and place. It will not be light before seven. Will that do for you?" Bernard assented. "As

for place," continued Stiff, "it's all the same to us. But I've a snug spot in my eye, down in Battersea-fields. So, if you 'll be in Palace-yard a quarter before seven to a second, you 'll see us making way in a hack in that direction, I 'll hoist a blue-and-white handkerchief, of this pattern, at each window. There 'll be light enough for you to see the signal, and then you 've nothing to do but to make sail after us, and we shall be on the ground in a quarter of an hour."

"I shall be there, sir," replied Bernard, "unless I should be prevented by a very foolish cause; and if so, you will please to understand that the engagement will stand good for the following morning."

"Not I," said the blunt sailor. "You are the challenger, and if you don't come to time, you may be expected to be posted as a coward."

"Such language is uncourteous and unnecessary, sir," observed Bernard, haughtily. "The simple fact is, that I expect a friend here every minute; and till his arrival, am not

sure of having pistols. If you will take a seat and wait till he comes, I shall be able to speak decidedly."

"Oh! if that's all, never mind," replied Lieutenant Stiff; "Bonus and I have both got plenty, and you and your second may choose. So that's settled. And now all I've to say is, to recommend you to make the best use of your time, for Bonus knows how to handle the poppers, I promise you. Mind, a quarter before seven,—New Palace Yard,—colours blue-and-white." And he rolled out of the room.

Our hero had scarcely been alone five minutes ere Ensign Williams made his appearance in a great bustle.

"Well, I've caught you at last!" he exclaimed, taking a seat. "I did all I could, but it was of no use. I couldn't obtain anything like a satisfactory apology. Nothing more than he said before. So you are to meet to-morrow morning, at seven o'clock, at the back of the Regent's Park."

“ Impossible !” exclaimed Bernard.

“ What do you mean, Audrey ?” cried the hot-headed Cambrian. “ Do you mean to disgrace yourself and me too ? Didn’t you write, as plain as possible, that you would leave the whole affair in my hands ; and have not I done every thing in my power to adjust the thing amicably ? And I should have done so too, if I had not had such a pig-headed fellow to deal with as that Brown.”

“ Don’t be hasty, Williams !” said our hero. “ Don’t let you and me quarrel, at any rate, for I have quite enough upon my hands as it is. My only reason for not fulfilling the engagement you have made for me, is—”

“ Zounds, Sir ! there can be no sufficient reason,” exclaimed the enraged second ; “ and I must say I consider myself exceedingly ill used.”

“ Will you hear me ?” said Bernard.

“ It is of no use,” almost roared the Ensign. “ You must either go out, as I have arranged, or by Heavens !—”

“ Well, Sir, I mean to do so,” resumed our

hero. “ Will that content you ? But do pray hear what I have got to say.”

Somewhat assuaged by this assurance, the fiery Ensign listened to Bernard’s, of course garbled, account of the insult which he had received, and the consequent appointment for the following morning.

“ All is settled,” he said, “ and as I am the challenger, it is utterly out of my power to make any alteration.”

Williams affected to condole with his friend ; but in reality felt gratified at an occurrence which he considered would increase his own importance ; and, after a brief consultation, it was agreed that he should go immediately to the Cannon, where Captain Popwell and his friend intended to sleep that night.

They were about to retire when he arrived there, and were somewhat surprised at such an untimely visit.

“ What can the fellow want ?” said Captain Brown. “ I have a great mind not to see him.

You have no idea how he has tried my temper. If he was not, as one may say, a raw recruit, we should certainly have made a double affair of it. And as it is, I doubt whether I did not let him go too far."

"Have him up," said Captain Popwell. "Never mind him. I remember how it was when I first joined. I couldn't be easy, for the soul of me, till I had gone out with somebody, about something or other, and hang me if I cared what, though now, as you know, there isn't a quieter fellow breathing."

His friend smiled at this well-known assertion, which the Captain habitually repeated so often as to induce some of his acquaintance to think that he began to believe it himself.

The Ensign entered the room in a stiff and stately manner, which greatly amused Captain Popwell, to whom he was, for the first time, formally introduced. "I am concerned, gentlemen," he said, "to be under the necessity of disturbing you at this time of night; but there

is a little demur on the part of my principal, respecting——”

“ Stop, sir !” exclaimed Captain Popwell, rising. “ I have no wish nor right to hear what you have to say. I shall not take the affair out of the hands of my friend ; but I tell you both, before I leave the room, that, if you can contrive to arrange the matter, even now, without a meeting, I shall be better pleased ; for, being conscious that I committed myself, I cannot feel any animosity toward Mr. Audrey.”

“ Oho !” thought the Ensign ; “ the white feather begins to show itself !” and, assuming additional stiffness and hauteur, he said, “ You mistake me, Sir. There can be no hesitation, on the part of my principal or myself, relative to the absolute necessity of going out. The only question relates to time and place. The fact,” he continued, in an off-hand style, as though two duels on the same morning were matters of common occurrence with him—“ The

fact is, that Mr. Audrey has another affair of the same nature in hand with a naval officer, and, unfortunately, at the same hour which we had appointed."

"The devil he has!" exclaimed Captain Popwell, throwing himself again into his arm-chair, folding his arms, biting his lips, and looking into the fire.

His appearance at that moment was well calculated to deceive a tyro like the Ensign. The simple fact was, that the Captain, in common with many others who have multiplied the same offence, considered that every man who had shown his courage by going out frequently, must be possessed of the nicest feelings. He now therefore viewed our hero in a new light, and reflected how poignantly the epithets he had used must have affected a person of such extremely delicate notions of honour."

"Well, sir," said Captain Brown, "are you prepared to name any other hour and place?"

The Ensign stated the arrangements already made by his principal, and then continued: "It will take some time to settle the first business, I dare say, as both parties are inveterate against each other; but, as they can't continue firing all day, though I expect they will not leave off till one falls, why, I should think the same ground would do for both affairs." Here he threw a glance at Captain Popwell, (who appeared to be in a reverie,) and then, turning to Captain Brown, concluded by saying—"Unless you have any thing else to propose?"

"What can I have to propose?" was the reply. "The ground cannot be a matter of any consequence, nor half an hour either"

"I thought—perhaps," slowly stammered the Ensign,—"possibly—that you and your friend might have thought the matter over more coolly—and—if so—why—it is not, even now, too late to agree to my proposition."

"What proposition? I do not comprehend you," said Captain Brown.

“ What I mentioned before,” replied Williams, “ that Captain Popwell should ask Mr. Audrey’s pardon.”

This blunder effectually and instantaneously dispersed all symptoms of the white feather. The person alluded to started from his recumbent position, and, darting upon the astonished sub with the fury of a lion, seized him by the collar, and shaking him violently, exclaimed, “ You infernal puppy ! Zounds ! can I believe my ears ? Such a reptile as you !”

“ My dear fellow !” cried Captain Brown, “ you are wrong indeed ! Consider—the words were addressed to me. You ought not to have heard them.”

“ Nonsense !” replied Popwell, “ the scoundrel knew I must hear them. The insult is personal and direct, and he shall either eat his words or I’ll kick him down-stairs.”

There are advantages and disadvantages consequent upon being somewhat undersized. First, among the former, may be reckoned the light-weight triumphs of fox-hunting ; and, of

the latter, one of the principal is the disagreeable predicament in which a little gentleman finds himself when falling, bodily, into the hands of a powerful and irritated opponent. Our Ensign might be somewhat more than five feet in height; but the Captain was decidedly nearer six, strong and active, and very far from particular in his way of handling small personages, for whom he was in the habit of frequently, and often, of course, very unjustly, expressing his contempt.

“Look you, you ruffian!” cried Williams, falling in his passion into his native dialect, which, by dint of industry, he had nearly divested himself of in common conversation; “Hur will mak you repent of this.—You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Let me go —will you!” and he struggled violently; reiterating that he was a gentleman, while the Captain held him firmly, and bestowed upon him every other title save that one so common yet so undefinable, and so much arrogated by all whose claim to it is at least doubtful.

“ I’ll tell you what, Popwell,” said Captain Brown laughing. “ He says you ought to be ashamed of yourself, and if I am not greatly mistaken, you very soon will.”

“ By George, you’re right!” exclaimed Popwell, loosening his hold, “ I am heartily ashamed of it. But these little fellows are always so cursedly impertinent, there’s no enduring them. There, get along with you, my man,” he continued, addressing Williams. “ Go home and pray to Cot to keep hur out of prabbles and prawls.”

“ I shall expect satisfaction for this!” exclaimed the enraged Ensign.

“ Oh, yes, to be sure, satisfaction,” said Popwell, coolly and contemptuously reseating himself. “ I wish your friend was gone, Brown,” he continued, raking out the bottom of the grate. “ It is getting late. You know I have no right to hear what he says.”

“ You shall hear from me in another manner!” exclaimed the indignant sub.

The only reply was a very indifferent attempt to whistle a well-known Welsh air ; and Captain Brown, with a great show of politeness, bowed his visitor out, assuring him of punctuality in the morning.

A long and wearisome detail of this squabble, with Ensign Williams's comments upon it, and reiterated imprecations of vengeance, were superadded to our hero's numerous inflictions of that eventful day ; and it was past one before he retired to his room, too uneasy in mind to sleep soundly, and too much fatigued in body to think coolly.

Damp, cold, and foggy was the succeeding morning, when Bernard, who, after tossing restlessly to and fro all night, had just begun to doze, was aroused by the unwelcome calls of honour.

To persons unused to early rising, the mere circumstance of being obliged to get up by candlelight is provoking. In dressing he missed the services of Andrews. Every thing was out

of its place ; he cut himself in shaving ; put on odd boots ; was hurried by the Ensign, declaring that they should be too late, and pacing the room as if purposely to impede the progress of the ceremonies which he wished to come to an end.

“ It is the last pound,” they say, “ that kills the overladen beast ;” and these petty vexations caused both principal and second to enter the hackney-coach in a state of irritability little likely to be decreased by reflection upon the past or present.

The vehicle, with the blue-and-white handkerchief at the window, was waiting their arrival in New Palace Yard ; the signal was given, another coach came up at the instant, and all moved on towards the field of action.

“ What is the meaning of that other coach astern ?” asked Lieutenant Stiff, coming up, when they all stopped, to the window of that in which our hero was seated. The Ensign explained ; and as soon as the inquirer had re-

turned to his principal, Bernard had the mortification of hearing a loud laugh. It seemed as though all was combining to rouse malevolence and vindictive feeling within him.

No sooner had the whole party alighted, than Captain Popwell and Lieutenant Bonus recognised each other, and the latter and his second were introduced to Captain Brown. A surgeon, who had been brought by the military men, joined these four, and they proceeded to the ground, leaving Bernard and his second to follow.

“ You’ve got the start of me this morning, Bonus,” observed Captain Popwell, loud enough to be heard by those in the rear.

“ Yes,” replied the Lieutenant, in the same tone. “ Who would have supposed, when we parted at the Tagus, that we should meet next on such a pop-gun business as this, where, between you and me,” he added, in a lower but still audible tone, “ the game is not worth powder and shot?”

“ No, no, Bonus,” said Popwell. “ Be just, my dear fellow. I have no doubt you have a man of honour to deal with, whatever your misunderstanding may be. For my own part, I assure you that if a moderate apology had been accepted, I should not have been here.”

“ He a man of honour!” exclaimed the Lieutenant. “ Pshaw! He has no idea of what it means. He is a paltry, sneaking, eves-dropping—”

“ Hist!” said Captain Brown, “ they are close behind, and will hear every word you say.”

“ All the better,” replied the Lieutenant.

“ I was not aware they were so near,” observed Captain Popwell; and then turning round, he addressed our hero with a frankness which probably would have led to a favourable result, but for the previous insinuations of Williams respecting the white feather. “ As you have, by chance, heard what I said, Mr.

Audrey," continued the Captain, "you are at liberty to consider it as spoken to yourself."

Bernard bowed stiffly, and observed that he left all to his friend.

"Very well, Sir," replied Popwell coolly, and taking the arm of the Lieutenant, he walked forward with him, and as they advanced, and while the seconds were measuring the ground, explained to him that he had, in a moment of irritation, for which (it afterward appeared) Mr. Audrey had not given the slightest cause, most grossly insulted him. "Therefore," said he, "feeling that I was in the wrong, and having no apprehension of being suspected of cowardice, I offered every apology which an officer and a gentleman could possibly make. You heard, likewise, what I said just now; so, if any thing happens, you will know I have not sought this, at any rate."

"All ready!" exclaimed Lieutenant Stiff.

"Please to take your ground, gentlemen,"

said the Ensign, “ and I will give the word to fire.”

It would be wrong to say that our hero displayed courage on this occasion, though he was totally divested of fear. All other feelings appear to have been overmastered within him by a deadly rancour and savage thirst of vengeance, when he saw his rival before him, and thought of the gross outrage inflicted upon his person on the preceding evening.

Both fired at the same instant, and the Lieutenant’s hat fell off.

“ A close shave,” observed Lieutenant Stiff, coolly walking up, taking the discharged pistol and handing its fellow to his principal. “ But you fired too high. One would think you were popping at the maintops.”

“ Have you anything to propose?” inquired Ensign Williams.

“ Only that you should get out of the way,” said Stiff, “ unless you wish to get a hole through you. But, avast ! Come this way, will you, to lee-

ward. That cargo of perfumery you've got aboard is enough to stop the men's breaths. Mind, I give the word this time ; so, none of your squeaking."

" What a brute the fellow is !" muttered the Sub, as he retired behind a tree.

Shots were again exchanged, and Bernard was sensible of an odd sensation in the right thigh, which, on examination, proved to have been grazed by his adversary's ball.

" I wonder if he will have any more ?" said Stiff. " Half a point more to windward, and you'd have set him a dancing without a fiddle."

" Any thing to propose ?" again inquired Williams.

" What are you bothering about ?" said Stiff. " If you've any thing to say, say it at once. We came here by your appointment. Do you mean to sheer off ? That's the only question."

The two Captains had hitherto kept at some

distance ; but, when it was evident that a third exchange of shots was intended, they came forward, and protested against any farther proceedings. What had passed, they said, was amply sufficient to satisfy any man's notions of honour ; the principals had faced each other like brave men, and as Mr. Audrey had been touched, if anything happened afterward it could be considered little better than cold-blooded murder.

“ Very well,” observed Stiff, “ I dare say you know more of these things than I do. I shouldn't like to run Bonus into shoal-water, nor get there myself. But I don't see how we can put about while the enemy's flag of defiance is hoisted.”

Captain Popwell advanced towards our hero and made similar representations. The haughty and even angry reply which he received was,

“ I cannot admit, Sir, that you have any right to interfere. I neither asked nor wish

for your advice. The insult which I have received from that person is not so easily to be expiated—never to be forgotten."

As he uttered the last words he literally trembled with rage, and called to his antagonist to take his ground.

"I could not have believed it, Brown," said Captain Popwell, taking the arm of his friend and walking away. "The fellow is more like a wild beast than a human creature. But you and I must not run the risk of witnessing such proceedings. Do not turn round till after they have fired. We have entered our protest, which is all we can do."

They had not walked far, ere they heard the report of two pistols, with the interval of a few seconds between the discharges.

On looking round they perceived that both duelists were standing; but the running of Stiff and the Surgeon towards the Lieutenant, indicated that something had occurred.

"It's nothing," observed the wounded man,

looking at his right-hand. “Balls are difficult things to catch, and as I could not hold it fast, it gave me an ugly twitch for the moment.”

“It could not have happened better,” said the Surgeon. “There’s just enough of it to put an end to this affair. Scored the palm delightfully—just in the right place—spoil your practice in pistol-firing for a week or two, that’s all. But how in the world the ball got here,” he continued, while examining the wound, “I can’t conceive. It has not lodged, that’s one comfort; but it is very strange. It must have described the segment of a circle round the butt of the pistol—”

“Round the butt of my granny!” exclaimed Lieutenant Stiff. “Bonus had dropped his arm, after firing at the word, and hang me! if I don’t believe the lubber yonder took a steady aim.”

“It is very extraordinary that neither of them appears disposed to come and see what has

happened," observed Captain Brown. "Surely they must be satisfied now."

Bernard and his second, however, still remained where they were; as the latter said it was out of the question, after the manner in which his former inquiries had been treated, for him to ask the opposite party if they had any thing to propose.

The vindictive feelings of his principal, we are sorry to say, were in no degree lessened by what he saw; for though it was plain that his adversary had received a wound, it was equally evident to him that the injury inflicted must be slight—far too slight to atone for the offence committed.

At length, Lieutenant Stiff left the group, and advancing towards the Ensign, inquired if he was satisfied. The latter exchanged a few words with our hero, and then replied,

"No, Sir. The insult sustained by my principal is of too deep a nature to be wiped away by a mere scratch."

“Humph!” said the blunt sailor, “I don’t like left-handed work neither; though, perhaps, Bonus might manage it as well as in boarding. Let me see,” he continued, turning to Bernard, “suppose you were to have a pop or two at me, wouldn’t that do as well? You needn’t be particular about it, for I would have served you just the same, if I had caught you sneaking behind a curtain.”

Bernard muttered something about “impertinence,” and “low fellow,” between his teeth; but having sufficient business already in hand for one morning, finished by inquiring, audibly, whether his opponent was really incapable of using his right hand. Stiff referred him to the surgeon, because, as he afterwards said, the idea of sheering off till the enemy hauled down his flag, stuck in his gizzard.

The Doctor, who had practised with the army, and been present at several rencontres, was not only peremptory, but took the liberty of telling Bernard that his conduct indicated a

thirst for blood, rather than the desire of settling a point of honour.

“If you say that he cannot return my fire,” observed our hero, “you have given your opinion on the only point upon which you are either requested or competent to speak. The rest is between myself and that person, who need not flatter himself that he will escape so easily. We must, of course, separate for the present.”

The Surgeon, on rejoining his friends, appeared shocked and depressed at what he had just heard.

“I would not have believed,” said he, “that such deadly malignity could exist within the human breast. Nothing short of the death of his adversary will satisfy him, and he considers the matter as merely deferred. I must tell you plainly now, Popwell, that, if your affair with him is to be carried on in the same spirit, I shall leave the place, for I will not be accessory to murder.”

“It was my intention,” replied the Captain,

“ to have received his shot, and then fire in the air ; but as he is so cursedly tenacious of his ground, I suppose that won’t do, and I must wing him in self-defence. Otherwise, upon my honour, as I gave the offence, and was alone in fault, I should be better pleased to let him off scot free.”

Captain Brown, who well knew the deadly accuracy of his friend’s practised hand, considered this declaration as nearly tantamount to a death-warrant passed upon his opponent, and therefore resolved to make a last effort at adjustment.

It is hardly worth while to inquire deeply into the motives by which such a character as Ensign Williams might have been actuated. Perhaps he prided himself in obstinacy—perhaps he hoped that the result of the present rencontre would leave Captain Popwell in such a condition as to incapacitate him from accepting his own challenge—and, perchance he wished ere he ventured to repeat the said challenge, to ascertain

how his adversary stood fire, and whether he really sported a white feather. Whatever the cause might be, he remained inflexible, and stuck to the offensive proposition of asking pardon.

“ Go, at all events,” said Captain Brown, quite out of patience, “ go and tell Mr. Audrey what I have said.”

“ It is of no use,” replied Williams, doggedly.

“ Don’t tell me that it is of no use !” exclaimed the Captain, angrily, “ what will your reflections be, when you see the corpse of your friend, and remember that, by a word, you might have saved him ? And, let me tell you, a dead man he is, as surely as he stands up before Popwell.”

Williams either conceived this assertion to be a vain boast, or, if he gave any credit to it, was thereby confirmed in whatever meaner feelings he might have cherished. But, as it was impossible to refuse so simple a request, with-

out the risk of incurring a more than single share of blame in case of a sinister event, he walked up to Bernard and whispered.

“He has been telling the old story over again, about the apology having been already made and all that. If you choose to feel satisfied—I’ve nothing to say.”

“I must leave the whole thing in your hands,” replied our hero. “This is a very different affair from the other; for, though Captain Popwell was decidedly wrong and hasty, he certainly had strong grounds for vexation and suspicion. I feel no sort of animosity towards him, and stand here merely on a point of honour, to be guided by you. Do not let me be disgraced, and then do what you will.”

“Now things have gone so far,” said Williams, “I do not see how you can, with honour, compromise the matter without exchanging shots. You may then say you are satisfied, and there will be an end of it.”

“Very well,” replied Bernard calmly, and,

when left alone, his feelings were very different from those which had hurried him along during the previous encounter. He regretted much to find himself under the necessity of engaging with a person against whom he harboured no ill will, and who had not hesitated to make an apology as soon as he believed that he had been in error. His unjustifiable conduct at Hackney, which had given rise to the whole affair, and his subsequent perjury, and base accusation of his innocent groom, now all rushed upon him.

When standing before the Lieutenant, jealousy and the thirst of vengeance domineered, and all angry passions bellowed in his ear, and hallooed him on to the vindictive strife. Now the small still whisper of conscience wrought not less powerfully. It told him that his quarrel was unjust, and he trembled.

“I knew it would be of no use,” said Williams, on returning to Captain Brown.

“It is better for you, however, that you went,” was the reply. “His blood will be

now on his own head, if he should fall; but I fear there is little chance for him."

The parties were then placed opposite to each other. The seconds retired, and the two naval officers and the Surgeon, at some distance, were looking on to watch the event.

The signal was given, and Captain Popwell instantly fired. Not so Bernard. In consequence of what had passed in his mind, he had come to the resolution of receiving his adversary's fire, and then discharging his own in the air. But the Captain's ball had entered his right shoulder, and caused an involuntary movement of the arm. Unconscious that he was wounded, he fancied the hair-trigger had not been set, and, in endeavouring to overcome the unexpected resistance, his unsteady hand let the pistol decline from the intended elevation—it went off, and his antagonist instantly fell.

"The infernal villain took a cool, deliberate aim!" exclaimed Stiff. "I cannot be mistaken this time, for I watched him purposely."

These words were heard by all; but the fallen Captain occupied their whole attention for the moment.

After having raised him, and examined the wound, the Surgeon looked at the by-standers, and shook his head.

“ You’d better be off, my dear fellows,” said Popwell, faintly; “ you can’t do me any good, and will only get yourselves into trouble.”

Bernard, who had advanced, and hitherto stood glaring upon the scene before him, as if unable to comprehend its import, now knelt before his adversary, who was supported in a sitting posture by his second.

“ Be gone!” cried the Surgeon with a frown.

“ I hope he is not much hurt,” murmured our hero. “ I had not the smallest intention of hitting him.”

“ It is a lie!” cried Stiff, indignantly, “ you aimed at him as at a target, and it is the second time this morning.”

“ I call Heaven to witness!” exclaimed Ber-

nard, little heeding at the moment the manner in which he was contradicted, “ I call Heaven to witness ! Captain Popwell must have seen and knows what I meant.”

“ This is no time for disputes,” said the Surgeon, seriously.

“ Captain Brown !” murmured our hero, “ I appeal to you ! You will acquit me, I am sure.”

“ I have no opinion to give at present,” was the brief reply, accompanied with a look of anger and contempt.

“ If my time is come,” said Captain Popwell, “ I freely forgive what has happened ; but, as I cannot consent to die with a lie in my mouth, I must say that it was not a fair shot,—so—the only favour I have to ask of my opponent, is to take himself off while he can. Go, sir, go ! Get out of the way before it is too late ! Your presence here troubles me ; for I should be sorry for you to be involved in difficulty on account of this affair, which I

was the first cause of.—I forgive you—let that suffice.”

These words were spoken with evident pain and difficulty. Bernard would have persevered in his endeavours at self-justification, but was interrupted by the Surgeon, who requested the bystanders to remove him.

“It is barbarous,” he continued, “to allow him thus to endeavour to deprive his victim of that mental tranquillity which is so absolutely necessary. Should he succeed in the fiend-like attempt, I cannot——”

“Come! come!” said Ensign Williams, taking him by the arm.

Lieutenant Bonus was about to interfere; but Bernard Audrey shrank from his touch as from that of a venomous animal. He then arose, and passively submitting himself to the guidance of his second, slowly left the field.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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